The RECTOR OF WYCK

May Sinclair

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by MAY SINCLAIR

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THE RECTOR OF WYCK

I

It was half-past seven in a morning of May, eighteen eighty-two.

Martha Fenwick sat up suddenly as the rap on the door waked her. She kicked off the bed-clothes and tossed out her white feet, eager for the day.

Such a day—clear, crystal sunlight streaming through the open window; outside, beyond Ormonde Terrace, down the intersecting yellow walks of Primrose Hill, the leaves of the young poplars turned and turned with a silver shivering; the red may trees were in flower and the warm wind brought to her their smooth, delicious smell. They were beautiful as they stood there in the sunlight, their heavy red-flowered branches drooping to the bright green grass.

Martha was excited. She felt that something was going to happen; every morning she woke with this feeling of something about to happen—something happy, something exciting. Anything might happen on a day like this.

She ran to the glass and pinned up the masses of her dark hair, while Susan, in the larger bed, turned and humped herself, cuddling into yet another sleep.

Martha looked at herself in the glass eagerly, to see

the mysterious, wonderful person that she was. She saw a sweet face, dim with softness like a face seen in the twilight; an innocent, intelligent nose with a long sunken bridge, wide nostrils and pensive, rounded tip; under it a firm, sweet mouth, thick lipped with blurred edges, and lifted as though it moved, smiling even when it was serious and at rest. Eyes, wide-set, that had the velvet bloom of brown pansies. Thick black eyebrows meeting in the scattered hairs of their roots.

Somehow, with all its faults, Martha's face was pretty, prettier than Susan's. It brooded and sparkled through its dusk, and smiled, and was never the same for two minutes together; while Susan's face, with the same thick features, hardly ever stirred; it was stiffly, coldly, pink and white. Susan's face between its blonde pig-tails might just as well be asleep as awake.

And yet something had happened to Susan. Susan was engaged to be married; lying there like a little pink pig, Susan was engaged to Philip Attwater, who of all the people that they knew was the cleverest, the most exciting. Philip wrote. He was "on" *The Parthenon* and *The Age*, so brilliant that Susan's mother was amazed at his wanting to marry Susan. If it had been Matty, now—Matty was the clever one, and there had been a time when everybody thought it would be Matty, even Philip himself, even Matty. She was beginning, just beginning to be in love with Philip; it was a good thing, she thought, that Philip made up his mind before she had gone in any deeper. As it

was, Matty got off safe, with an almost imperceptible bruise to her vanity. And when Mrs. Fenwick said, "Susan isn't a bit clever, I thought it was you he wanted, Matty," Matty answered in a great hurry, "Oh, no, he never did. Clever men never do want clever women —I don't mean that I'm clever."

She was not so vain that she couldn't see that Philip had done the happiest and the wisest thing. Perhaps Susan wasn't very clever, but she was good and gentle; wherever she was she spread round her a perfect peace. And peace was what clever men wanted more than anything, peace to think in. Philip was restless. And she, Matty, was restless too, always excited, always wanting things to happen, whereas Susan didn't care if they never did. Susan's happiness had come to her because she wasn't looking for it.

"I shall never leave off looking," Matty said to herself.

It might happen to-day, to-day.

She slipped into her white flannel dressing-gown and ran off to get the bath before anybody else could grab it.

She watched her slender girl's body stretched out, wonderful, mysterious, privet-white in the greenish water, her hands deeply immersed, the fingers strangely drawn out and sharpened like—like ivory penholders under the attenuating planes of the water. She wondered why. If you put your head under water would your nose grow longer and longer? She stirred, and the greenish planes shook into half rings and ribbons of silver light.

Her thoughts ran on: Philip. Philip Attwater. Philip Seaman Attwater. Mrs. Seaman Attwater. Susan Attwater. Martha Attwater. Martha didn't sound so well as Susan. They were made for each other, Philip's restless nerves and Susan's peace.

Presently Susan would knock at the door and call to her to get out of the bath. "I wouldn't mind," Susan would say, "if you were washing, but you just lie there and splash." And Matty sat up and washed herself in a violent hurry, not to keep Susan waiting.

And now she was sitting at the glass again, brushing out her thick dark hair.

"I'm not a bit prettier than Susan." Susan's skin was so clear and pink and white. Well, so was hers for that matter, only a darker pink.

"But my eyebrows are too thick," she thought. She wondered if that was why Philip—— No. It was simply because Susan was a darling.

And as she looked at herself Matty had an idea. She would do her hair in the new way. She plaited it into two long ropes and coiled them so that they stood up like a round hat on the top of her head. Now she was in the fashion.

Susan came in as she finished. Matty turned.

"What do you think of *that?*"

"It's rather nice," said Susan. "I wish I could do mine that way."

"Why don't you?"

"Philip wouldn't like it."

"Are you always going to do what Philip likes?"

"Always," said Susan.

"Well, anyhow," Matty thought, "if I'm not going to be married, I can do my hair the way *I* like it."

She didn't care whether Philip liked it or not, she knew she looked charming in her rose-coloured cotton frock, with the big coils of dark hair standing up like a round hat on the top of her head.

Downstairs, in the dining-room, she found Mother and Father waiting. The darlings didn't reproach her for being late.

Mother had a kind face with a thick, firm mouth, a plain face that Matty thought beautiful. She was blonde and plump and pink, like Susan. Father was lean and iron-grey and legal; he wore funny little three-cornered whiskers in front of his ears. He had contributed nothing to his daughters' appearance except the thickness of Matty's eyebrows and the length of Matty's nose.

She ran into the room, tossing her new head.

"What do you think of me now?"

Mother said it was queer, but she supposed she would get used to it in time. Father said he didn't know Matty was so good-looking.

"Has it made all that difference?"

It was tremendous, the difference it made. If Father thought her good-looking there couldn't be any more doubt about it. And something would happen, happen, happen. Perhaps to-day. Perhaps to-morrow. She had never been in love with Philip Attwater. Not really.

And so in eagerness and excitement, in the clear sunshine of May, Matty's day began.

After breakfast Father went off to his office in the Temple. Father was a barrister, to whom briefs came regularly, as a matter of course; thus, in comfort and security, the tall white house in Ormonde Terrace was kept going. And Father gone, Mother settled down in the dining-room with her sewing; Susan practised her Mozart and her scales in the drawing-room overhead; and when Matty had arranged the flowers and brushed Musca, the blue Persian, till his coat shone like looking-glass, she sat at the dining-room table before her Dante and her Italian Dictionary, with John Carlyle's translation of the "Inferno" as a refuge in case of serious trouble. Dante was a standing proof that Matty was the clever one. He had stood now for some months, Matty's progress being slow. The little thing was desperately conscientious; she struggled and struggled and only turned to John Carlyle in the very last extremity.

Mother would look up from her work and say, "How's Dante going?"

And the answer would be sometimes, "Beautifully," and sometimes, "Horribly."

This morning it was "Horribly."

"Put him away, my dear, and go and take Tinker for a walk."

"No, I must wait for Susan. Besides, I don't want to be beaten."

"You should have married Philip, dear. He'd have helped you with your Dante."

"Philip didn't want to marry me."

"He did once, dear, but you put him off."

Mother had always believed it, for Matty was her favourite.

"Anyhow, I don't want to marry *him*."

She was sure of it now. Across the lines:

> "E vederai color che son contenti
> Nel fuoco perché, speran di venire,
> Quando che sia, alle beate genti . . . "

the shining day sang to her. Something better, more exciting even than Philip, would happen to her. If not to-day, then to-morrow.

Kate, the parlourmaid, came into the room to take the silver to the pantry to be cleaned—the tea-caddy, the classic urn that held biscuits, and the tall candlesticks. She remembered. Kate, poor Kate, had a headache.

"How's your head, Kate?"

"Awful bad, Miss. I don't hardly know what to do with it."

"Go and lie down. Kate may go and lie down, Mother, mayn't she?"

"Certainly she may," said Mother.

"I can't lie down with all my silver."

"I'll clean your silver."

"You'll do nothing of the sort, Miss Matty. You'll set and study. I'll be better moving about and not thinking of it."

Kate wouldn't go and lie down.

And for a moment Matty was unhappy. Her little

face became dark with compassion. She was always sorry for people who were unhappy, people who were down-trodden, people who were ill. Kate was ill. Kate was down-trodden. Kate was unhappy.

"It isn't fair," she said. "It isn't fair that I should sit here reading Dante, and Kate should have to clean silver."

"But Kate would rather clean silver than read Dante. Kate doesn't want to read Dante," her Mother said.

"She ought to want to. She would if she'd been properly educated, if she hadn't been down-trodden all her life."

"Kate down-trodden! She's full of pride and independence, and she's had all the education she wants."

"How do you know what she wants? She has to do horrid, uninteresting things all day while I can do what I like. It isn't fair."

"We don't all like the same things. Kate likes housework. She told me so."

"Don't believe her. Nobody could really like it," said Matty.

"You're a little goose," said Matty's Mother.

"There, Susan's finished. We'll go and take Tinker for a walk."

She closed her Dante. Not even to herself would Matty own that it was a relief to have done with him, that in some of his moods Dante bored her.

Susan and Matty took Tinker into the Regent's Park. By the end of the bridge over the canal the lame beggar lifted his poor head and waited. The lame

beggar frightened Matty with his drawn face and his dreadful little shrunken eyes in their blood-red, outturned lids. But she was sorry for him, and suddenly she was unhappy again.

"Oh, I've forgotten his pennies. I must go back."

And Susan had to wait while Matty ran back for the pennies.

She dropped four into the beggar's cap, two for today and two for yesterday when she had forgotten him.

"It's all very well," said Susan, "but you only give him pennies to please yourself, so that you mayn't feel too uncomfortable when you pass him."

Matty stared. It wasn't like Susan's gentleness. She had never come out with anything so sharp as that before.

"I wonder."

Matty really wondered; she considered it carefully, trying to see clear through her own motive. She was conscientious about everything.

"I think," she said, "I really did it to please him. I couldn't bear to think he was looking for the pennies and they didn't come. That would make me uncomfortable."

"Philip says charity's what we do for other people to please ourselves."

That was it, then. It was from Philip that Susan had caught that touch of cynical asperity.

"I don't care what Philip says. I did want to please him."

"You want to please everybody. It's your way of pleasing yourself."

"Well, isn't it a nice way?"

"Oh, nice, yes. You're the nicest thing I know, Matty, except Philip. . . . You must put Tinker's lead on, or he'll run after the sheep."

"Poor, poor Tinker. Good Tinker. Nice Tinker. There, did they?"

Matty snapped the lead into the ring while the fox-terrier grovelled, abasing himself, his nose wriggling between his outstretched forepaws.

They walked to the end of the Broad Walk and home again.

So the bright day went on.

In the afternoon Mrs. Fenwick had a tea-party. Susan made the tea and Matty and Philip Attwater handed round the cake and bread-and-butter. Philip was tall and slender and young, only three years older than Susan, who was only two years older than Matty: six-and-twenty, he was, to Matty's twenty-one. He had a slender face, almost handsome but spoilt by something sparse and pinched about it, a thin, high nose, a high forehead and a twisted, sensitive, humorous mouth. His hair was sleek and fine but he hadn't quite enough of it. Very soon, Matty thought, he would begin to be bald. She didn't like bald men. But Susan, dear, sweet Susan, wouldn't mind a bit.

"Perhaps," she thought, "I shouldn't mind if I really cared for him." And then, "I wonder what sort of man I should really care for."

Anyhow, whatever he was, he wasn't there. The people who came that afternoon were not, poor things,

very interesting. Matty was sorry for them. It must feel dull, she thought, to be so dull. She admired her Mother who contrived to talk to them as if they were the most thrilling people she had ever met; they wouldn't go away feeling that they had been uninteresting. Unless Philip made them feel it. Philip wasn't mixing with them very well. He had a tendency to stick to Susan and to drift back to her whenever Mother's introductions separated them.

Matty reproached him. "You might go and talk to somebody besides Susan."

"Yes, Philip," Susan said, "you might."

"Why should I? I don't want to talk to anybody else."

Philip would never do anything he didn't want to. Even Susan couldn't make him. And he hated dull people.

Well, Matty couldn't say she loved them; she would rather they hadn't been dull; yet she was happy going to and fro among them, saying little harmless things that pleased them, trying, like her mother, to make them feel interesting. She was afraid she wasn't very good at it. Mother said you should talk to people about the things that interest them. But how did you begin? How did you find out what interested them? You couldn't go up to old Mrs. Jenkins and say, "Mrs. Jenkins, what interests you? Tell me, and we'll talk about it." That wasn't the way to be interesting yourself. And Matty wanted to be interesting. And when she saw old Mrs. Wade sitting neglected in a corner, she went to her and listened with an air of intense

concentration to the endless story of how Mrs. Wade's companion, Miss Jourdain, had left her.

"It's a pity she had to go so soon," said Matty.

"My dear, she was impossible. Impossible!"

"What did she do?"

"She talked to the man who comes to tune the piano."

"I don't see anything in that. I always want to talk to piano-tuners and people, just to see what they're like."

"Yes, but you don't do it. She did."

"What did she talk to him about?"

"She *said* it was about the piano."

"Well, perhaps it was."

"It wasn't. That woman knows no more about a piano than the cat."

"Then perhaps she only wanted to be kind to him."

"Goodness knows what she wanted. She wasn't a nice person, my dear. I couldn't keep her."

"Of course you couldn't keep her if she wasn't nice."

"And I'm left all alone. And I don't like being alone. You don't know what it is, all day long, having nobody to talk to."

"Having nobody to find fault with," Matty thought. But she said, "It must be dreadful. I'm so sorry."

Then she saw Philip looking at her and listening. Philip smiled. And when old Mrs. Wade had gone he came to her.

"Why do you tell lies to that disagreeable old woman?" he said.

"I don't. I really am sorry for her. I'm sorry because she's disagreeable."

"You're not a bit sorry. You're a shocking little humbug."

"I'm not going to hurt people's feelings to please you."

"I'm glad you draw the line somewhere. There's no good trying to please everybody."

"Hadn't you better talk to Susan? She does it, too."

"Susan'll grow out of it. I'll help her."

"You mean you'll make her as awful as you are yourself."

"I'm sincere, Matty."

"I hate your sincerity. It's nothing but nasty, hard, stuck-up, swaggering pride. You're not a kind person, Philip."

"No, thank God, I'm not."

"Except to Susan."

"That's Susan's fault, not mine."

No, he wasn't a kind person. But he was right. She was a humbug. She hadn't really been interested in Mrs. Wade's story. And oh, how interested, how excited Matty could have been if—if somebody interesting, somebody exciting should appear! She had always that hope; no experience diminished it. It so uplifted, so sustained her, that the party would be over before she realized that she had not enjoyed it. At any minute the door might open and somebody might come in.

Somebody new, somebody you had never seen before. They hadn't been very long in Ormonde Terrace, and all sorts of people were still calling on them. At any minute it might happen.

Only it didn't happen that afternoon.

The letter came by the last post. Matty's cousin, Alice Bentley, wrote to tell them that she was engaged to Edward Farrar, once the curate of All Souls, Cheltenham, and now vicar of Upper Speed, near Wyck-on-the Hill. They were to be married in June and Susan and Matty were to be bridesmaids. It was all settled. They were to go down, Father and Mother and the two girls, to Cheltenham for the wedding and Matty was to stay on till July with Aunt Fanny. Alice said Matty couldn't believe how happy she was. "My dear, I'm simply in heaven."

Matty didn't believe it, she couldn't think what possessed Alice to go and marry a parson, and a country parson. "Of all the dull and dreary things," and "Edward," too. She was sure that Edward would be dull and dreary.

"Alice doesn't think he is," Susan said. "*You* haven't got to marry him."

"I wouldn't marry a parson if there wasn't another man in the world. I'd die sooner."

And Matty began thinking of the kind of man she would like to marry. He must be thrilling. He must do exciting things. He must be something: a traveller who would go with her round the world; a sailor—no, sailors couldn't take their wives with them on their

ships—a soldier stationed in India; or somebody in the diplomatic service, say, first secretary to an Embassy; even a consul would do if he lived somewhere exciting, in Rome, or Athens, or Constantinople. Or Tokio. More than anything Matty wanted to travel, to see the world, its far-off deserts, its forests, its splendid cities; to go somewhere where she had never been before, to have a wonderful, adventurous life. She didn't want money, at least not more money than would be needed to go about the world with; she didn't want peace; she wanted change, movement, difference, the unknown. She had an instinct, a premonition; she felt that some day her life would be more beautiful than anybody else's life; some day the miracle would happen. Far-off, in the place unknown, the shining thing waited for her. She had only to go out to meet it, only to keep herself for it.

And Matty thought of love, the passionate love she would have for the man who should make her life a wonder; there would be strangeness and beauty and mystery about him, something she would recognise the instant she saw it as the thing that she would love passionately and for ever. There would be no uncertainty as there had been in her feeling for Philip Attwater. When the moment came and the man she would be magnificently sure. The thing would be tremendous.

She wiped clean out of her list all curates, rectors, vicars, deans, archdeacons and bishops; they had no shining thing to give her; they were all tame, uninteresting, utterly hopeless. She was sorry for her poor

little cousin Alice, and she was not sure that she wanted to go and stay with Aunt Fanny in Cheltenham, where Edward Farrar had been curate of All Souls. Cheltenham must be a dull and dreary place if Alice couldn't find anything more exciting than Edward Farrar there.

II

CHELTENHAM.

It was all over. Alice was married. Father, Mother and Susan had gone back to London, leaving Matty behind with Aunt Fanny in the great white stucco house in Pittville Circus. The wedding had been a big successful affair in the slate-roofed, yellow brick and freestone pile of All Souls. Alice had looked lovely, and the bridesmaids' frocks were crushed strawberry silk, Matty's favourite colour, wonderful, half-hooped skirts with waterfall backs. Matty turned her head like a little peacock to get a sight of her waterfall swinging out behind.

But Edward Farrar—he proved to be every bit as uninteresting as he had sounded: sandy hair, and a cold, straight up and down face. A white stucco face with no nice little surprising kinks in it. His mouth looked as if it were holding something that would fall out if it opened, so that you wondered how he managed to intone. He stood up very lean and stiff and solemn in his black clergyman's clothes, high waistcoat and white dog-collar.

How could Alice have married him? And how could Aunt Fanny be so happy about it? She said there was nobody like Edward. Matty, in secret, hoped there wasn't. The sight of him was enough to keep you off clergymen for ever. But what she felt was that there would be others where he came from; Cheltenham was

full of clergymen and retired colonels and schoolmasters and schoolmistresses. It had no doors that would open to the shining miracle. No good hoping that anything would happen there.

And Aunt Fanny kept on wondering who they would have in Edward's place. All Souls sustained two curates, and Edward had been the senior one; young Mr. Seymour-Jones was too young for promotion; who, who, Aunt Fanny perpetually wondered, would be the new senior curate of All Souls? One thing was certain, he would be an Oxford man; All Souls had always had Oxford men.

"You're not interested, Matty?"

"I'm not excited. I can't work up any enthusiasm over parsons."

"Why not? Parsons aren't different from other men."

"They seem different, somehow. Not quite men. Perhaps it's their clothes."

"But look at Edward, surely you wouldn't say that Edward——"

"No, Auntie, of course *not* Edward," said Matty with awful insincerity. She couldn't bear to hurt Aunt Fanny's feelings. What would Philip have thought of her now?

"You've only to look at him," said Aunt Fanny.

"Only to look at him," said Matty.

And Aunt Fanny turned.

"Matty—you don't like Edward."

"Oh, Auntie, it isn't that. I don't not like Edward. It's simply that I don't like parsons."

"You're not reasonable, my child."

"I'm afraid I'm not, very. Perhaps it's the clothes. The high waistcoat and the little round hat, you know. And it's only, only that I wouldn't like to marry one."

"I'm glad Alice didn't think like you. I should have lost a good son-in-law. You know, dearest, Edward is very well connected."

"He would be," said Matty.

"I don't think I'm a snob, but it does tell."

"Oh, no, Auntie, you're not a snob."

If Aunt Fanny hadn't been such a darling——She was a small, lean, nimble woman with the face of a little pretty monkey, brown monkey's eyes—restless eyes, twinkling and turning. She had a way of putting little cuddling monkey paws on your shoulders and telling you that you looked bonny to-day. She was doing everything she could to make Matty happy, asking the best people (she let you know they were the best) and giving beautiful garden-parties for the crushed strawberry silk.

That was how Matty met him.

That afternoon all the young people had come prepared to play tennis. Matty was hidden away in the dining-room, giving tea to some old ladies as he arrived, and when she first saw him he was playing, dressed in flannels and a white sweater, so that she couldn't possibly have told——

Aunt Fanny was excited because the new curate, Mr. John Crawford, had come; the rector had brought him. There were a great many clergymen there in their high

waistcoats and little round hats, and Matty supposed that he would be one of them. Matty, in the crushed strawberry silk, sat on a seat by the tennis court between two boys from the college who talked across her about the last cricket match. They were sufficient to themselves. So Matty watched the young man in the white sweater. And every now and then, when he stood up to serve, he looked at Matty, and caught her watching him, and looked away, and did it again the next time; and once, when the ball rolled to Matty's feet and he came stooping after it, he looked up under his eyebrows into Matty's face, a sudden quick, shy look. Handicapped by the junior curate, he was playing gloriously, winning the game all by himself in spite of Mr. Seymour-Jones. Matty liked the way he smiled and said, "Hard luck, partner," every time that Mr. Seymour-Jones made a fault or missed a return. She liked his strong, swiftly moving body, slender in the white sweater; she liked his dark, "distinguished" head and his close-clipped curly hair; she liked his queer dark face that was almost plain with its irregular blunted nose, at variance with the straight line of his wide thin mouth and the straight bars of his eyebrows coming low down on the iris of his eyes. His eyes were beautiful, clear, greenish black hazel, looking gravely out under the black bars.

The set was over; he had won it. The two college boys got up to play, and for a moment Matty was alone. For a moment he stood aside talking to his opponents, and when they moved away she thought that he would go with them; but he didn't, he hung back, looked

round him and then turned and came slowly to the place where Matty sat alone.

"May I sit here?" he said.

"Please do," said Matty. And there was a pause. She didn't know what to say next. Besides, it was his turn.

"You're not playing," he said presently.

"No, there are so many people want to play."

She was thinking, too, that the crushed strawberry silk wasn't very good for playing in; it was tight under the arms and made a loud rustling noise when she ran.

"You want to?"

"Yes." She did want to play now that he had asked her. "But I can't yet. I"m a sort of hostess. I half belong to the house."

"*Half* belong?"

"Mrs. Bentley is my aunt. I'm Martha Fenwick."

He smiled.

"Then you live here?" His eyes shone.

"No. I live in London. I'm only staying."

His eyes darkened. His thoughts were like a clearly printed page open for her to read. His eyes said, "I like you. I want you to be here."

"Do you like living in London?"

"Yes, awfully."

"Better than staying in Cheltenham?"

"Yes. It's the sort of place anything might happen in."

He smiled again. She liked the good, kind way he smiled.

"What do you think will happen?"

"That's it. I don't know. I'd rather something happened that I didn't know, wouldn't you?"

"Can't things you don't know happen in Cheltenham?"

"No, I really don't think they can. I know everything that can happen here. I mean the sort of thing."

"What sort of thing?"

"Well, meeting parsons, you know. Cheltenham's full of them."

At that he laughed aloud, joyously, showing white, wholesome teeth. She liked the way he laughed.

"Don't you like meeting parsons?"

"Not very much," she said.

"Still, things do happen in Cheltenham. I didn't know I was going to meet you."

"And *I* didn't know I was going to meet *you*."

"Well, there you are . . . I say, am I boring you?"

"Not a bit."

"What would you be doing if I wasn't here?"

"I might be talking to the new curate. See what you've saved me from."

At that he laughed again, more joyously than ever. And then, "I'm sorry you don't like parsons."

"Why?"

"Because I'm one. In fact, I'm the new curate."

"Oh-h!" said Matty. She could have cried to think of the frightful thing she had done. "I'm so sorry. But how could I tell?"

He laughed again.

"You mean I'm a sheep in wolf's clothing?"

"Oh, no," said Matty very earnestly. "Not a sheep."

And presently, when the party was thinning and the courts were empty and the two college boys prowled about, hungry for more tennis, Matty proposed that they should make a four.

"You'll be my partner?" he said. "Just to show you've forgiven me."

"Can you ever forgive *me?*"

"Forgive you? I wouldn't have missed it for the world. You were delightful."

They played till the bell rang and Aunt Fanny came out and made the boys and Mr. John Crawford stay to dinner. They played again till the balls were dim against the grass, until in the violence of the game Matty's frock split under her right arm with a great cry. The crushed strawberry silk was ruined.

But, as Matty said, it was worth it.

After that he came again. Every time he was asked he came. He came to lunch; he came to dinner; he came to tea; he played singles with Matty when nobody else was there. Aunt Fanny kept on asking him, and gave as her reason that he so obviously wanted to be asked. And once Matty and Aunt Fanny went to tea with him at his rooms in the little white terrace in Winchcombe Street. And once he went with them for a picnic to Birdlip, and once he took Matty for a walk up Cleeve Hill. And Matty, who had hated Cheltenham, began to love the white and green town with its square-topped Regency houses and its tall trees planted along the streets. She found magic in the sunlight on Cleeve Hill and in the long, naked rampart of Leck-

hampton, and its hedge of ragged firs standing up against the sky. She thought there was nothing so delightful as a walk up and down the Promenade. You went to it from Pittville Circus through Winchcombe Street, past the little white terrace.

She stayed a week longer than she had intended, and then another week, and went back loving Aunt Fanny more than she had ever loved her.

"I was afraid," her Mother said, "you were never coming back."

"Why shouldn't I come?"

"Well, I thought something had happened to you."

"What should happen to me?"

Matty was cross, for, though she didn't know it, she wanted to be back in Cheltenham. She was haunted by visions of the square-topped Regency houses and the long lines of trees, and the fir-fringed rampart of the hill, and the little white terrace in Winchcombe Street, visions of a dark, "distinguished" young man who wore a high waistcoat and a little round hat, whose eyebrows came close down over his eyes. It would be ages before she saw John Crawford again.

Then one day in August, her birthday, just three weeks since she had said good-bye to him, he surprised her by calling at Ormonde Terrace. He had a holiday and had come up to spend it in London.

"I thought," Matty said, "you were going to the Lakes?"

He had told her he was going to the Lakes for his holiday.

"So did I up to last night. But you see I didn't go."

"You changed your mind in a great hurry."

"But I changed it."

"Don't you know your own mind?"

"Yes. I know it better than I know most things. What I didn't know was whether you'd care for me to come. I had to risk that."

"Of course I care. I'm very glad to see you."

Pause.

"Why did you think I wouldn't care?"

"Because Cheltenham isn't London. I didn't know what you would be like in London."

"Well—what am I like?"

"I don't think I know yet. That's another frock, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's another frock. But it's the same me. Really, it's the same me. Can't you see it's the same?"

"Yes, yes, when you look like that. If only you can keep it up."

"Of course I'll keep it up."

"And," he said, "I don't know your people."

"You'll know them in a minute if you'll stay to tea."

"What are you doing after tea?"

"I *was* going for a walk." She wasn't. She had only thought of it that minute, because she hoped he would want to go with her.

"By yourself?"

"Myself and Tinker. He's my dog."

"I suppose you—you wouldn't let me come with you? And Tinker."

"Rather. I hoped you'd come."

"I say, that was nice of you."

They would go, Matty said, into the Regent's Park. It was a nice quiet place to talk in.

It struck half-past-four and Kate came in bringing the tea-things. Then Mother and Susan and Philip Attwater came, and John Crawford had to be introduced.

Mrs. Fenwick was pleased to see him, and Matty was pleased with her for being pleased. Mother and Susan were behaving beautifully, as if it were the most natural thing in the world for John to come and see Matty and for Matty to talk to him like somebody who had known him all her life. It was only when she caught Philip looking hard at her that Matty began to feel shy. Philip would be sure to think things. She wondered what he was thinking, and she wished he would get up and talk to John instead of sitting there looking as if he didn't like him. Then suddenly Philip remembered that John Crawford had been at Balliol before him (he had heard of him there) and his arrogance unbent, and they talked about Balliol and Jowett and about Matthew Arnold, who, Philip said, had made poetry out of the Oxford manner. John Crawford thought that Matthew Arnold was weak in theology and that *Literature and Dogma* was not his best work. Philology wasn't metaphysics. You couldn't, John said, reduce the concept of Absolute Being to the verb "to breathe." Philip seemed so

pleased with him that Matty was terrified lest he and Susan should propose to go with them into Regent's Park. But they didn't.

The Park, instead of being nice and quiet that afternoon, was full of poor people out on holiday. They walked to the lake where the crowd was thickest; it pressed on them, and John guided her through it with his hand on her arm. Matty didn't mind the crowd; she was too happy. All her life she had had moments when she was so happy that her heart went out to the whole world. It beat tight and full, bursting with compassion and with love for everybody. She had one of those moments now. She loved all these people, the mothers and the little girls and boys playing and the fathers wheeling the perambulators or carrying the babies in their arms. She loved them; she was glad they were there for her love to flow over them and hold them. She thought that John loved them, too; he smiled so kindly at the mothers, and put his hand so gently on the heads of the children when they ran and butted into his legs.

There was a refreshment booth on the east side of the lake, and there, drawn up by the edge of the path in his wheel chair, a hunchback sat, drinking a cup of tea. His head was sunk between his shoulders as if poised on the top of his deformed, protruding chest; his thick lips were parted, showing swollen gums; he was smiling; his eyes stared out over the rim of the teacup with a sort of soft, mournful happiness, contented.

And as Matty looked at him her eyes filled with

tears. John, who was looking at Matty, saw the tears.

"What is it?" he said.

"Did you see him, the poor hunchback, drinking his tea?"

"Yes, I saw him."

"Well, I couldn't bear it."

"But—he was happy. Content."

"That's it. When you think that this was perhaps the only moment of happiness in all his poor dreadful life, and that it would be all over so soon, and that he should be content with it. That's what made me cry."

"You mustn't cry, dear. He *is* happy now. Perhaps it isn't his only moment. Perhaps he'll be happy again. Perhaps he isn't as unhappy as you think he is."

"Oh, do you think he isn't? I'm so glad you're with me and not Philip or Susan. Philip would have laughed at me, and Susan would have said I was a little goose. You don't think I'm a goose, do you?"

"Indeed I do not." He really didn't.

"It's because I've always, always had the feeling that people are so sacred, somehow, and so pathetic; so infinitely, so unbearably pathetic; people out on holidays, in char-à-bancs, looking at things and being happy."

"Yes, Matty."

"And they've such a short time to live, and such a very short time to be happy in. However can they be unkind to each other?"

"How can they? How can we? If everybody felt as you do, this world would be heaven."

"Only just to be kind. That's everything, I think."

"It's nearly everything. It's the greatest thing."

A pause, and then Matty spoke.

"Does it—does it amuse you to be a parson?"

"Amuse me? Yes, I suppose it does. I hadn't got to be one; my people would have let me be anything I liked. But this is what I chose to be."

"I wonder why."

"All *this* is why. These pathetic people. I felt like you about them; I've had that feeling always, too. That sense of sacredness. I wanted to help them. And it struck me I could do it best this way. It brought them nearer."

"I should have thought it would have kept them away. That they'd have felt the difference."

"What difference? There isn't any difference. Do you mean they'd have felt that I was in a sort of pulpit."

"Something like that."

"Oh, well, they can see I'm not. They can see I'm just another fellow, like one of themselves."

"But you're not. There are all sorts of things you can't do. You can't, for instance, say 'Damn.' Don't you want to say 'Damn' sometimes?"

"Sometimes. I'd say it in a minute if I thought it would do them any good."

"But you can't."

"There are so many things I want to do and can't. The thing I want to do most in the whole world I can't do."

"Why can't you?"

"Well, it doesn't depend on me. It depends——"

"On other people?"

"On somebody else."

"Does the somebody else know what you want to do?"

"I'm not sure, Matty."

"Then I should tell him."

"Her. Her."

"I should tell her. Is it anything she can do for you?"

"Yes. If she would."

"Then she ought to know it."

"I don't know that she wants to know it."

"I should think she'd rather know it than not know it."

"You think she would?"

"Yes. But I can't tell for certain. You see, I don't know what it is you want to do."

"It's something that would make her very happy if she wanted it. But I don't know if she does want it."

"I should find out."

"Yes, but I should have to ask her to wait for it. Years, perhaps, till I got a living."

"If she's any good, she'll wait."

"If it was you, would you?"

"If it was me, and I wanted it, I'd wait ages."

"If it was you, and if you wanted it—it *is* you. And you know what it is I want."

"I don't. I don't, truly."

"I want you to marry me."

"Oh, I didn't think it would be that!"

"You must have known."

"I didn't, truly. I knew you liked coming to see me; I couldn't think why. I just thought I was another girl you knew."

"That's why. And there isn't any other girl. And you will, darling, you will?"

Then, very solemnly and firmly, as if it were a statement he defied her to contradict—"I love you, Matty."

They had passed through the crowd now and were wandering in the open spaces of the Park.

"You don't love me as much as I love you—Oh! catch Tinker, or he'll run after the sheep."

He caught Tinker.

"I shall have to carry him. I've forgotten his lead."

"I'll carry him. You *are* going to marry me, Matty?"

"Yes, but I shall make you a shocking bad wife, you know."

"Are you afraid of being a parson's wife? You don't like parsons, so I can't conceive how you can stand me."

"I don't think of you as a parson. I don't think of you as anything but *you*. But I'm glad you're a parson, if that's what you want to be."

"But to marry a parson wasn't exactly what you wanted, was it."

"No. It wasn't. But it's what I want now."

"Do you know, if it hadn't been for that hunchback I mightn't have had the courage to ask you."

"Why, what had he got to do with it?"

"Everything. He showed me what you were like. I didn't know it."

Another pause, and then Matty looked at him earnestly.

"My eyebrows are much too thick. Do you mind?"

"I adore your eyebrows."

"Do you know," said Matty, "this is my birthday. I'm twenty-two."

"Oh!—as young as that?"

"Did you think I looked older?"

"No. But—I'm much too old. I'm thirty-two. Ten years older than you are. Do you mind?"

"I adore your age."

And so, months before he would have thought it possible, John Crawford and Matty were engaged.

"Are you quite sure you care for him, Matty." said her Mother. "You know you used to say you'd die sooner than marry a parson."

"It's no matter what I said. I didn't know him then. I'm sure, absolutely sure."

"You were sure about Philip."

"No, Mother, I wasn't. I always had an awful little sneaking feeling that I wasn't sure. It was only his mind I loved, because he was clever. I loved Philip with nothing but my mind. I love John with all there is of me."

"Is he clever, darling?"

"I don't know. I don't care whether he is or not. It's not his mind I am in love with."

"What is it, Matty?"

"It's him—him—him. There isn't anybody like him."

"That's what Alice used to say about Edward."

"Don't talk to me about Edward. You've only got to look at John——"

"Well, he is distinctly nice to look at, I'll say that of him," said Mother.

But you could see that she was glad.

III

Matty slid into her engagement without a scruple or a misgiving. What had happened to her seemed so natural and inevitable that it was full three days before she became aware that she had done an appalling thing. She had deceived John. She had accepted him without revealing the awful truth about herself. As a matter of fact, Matty had never thought of it. In the first delicious moment when she confessed her love she had forgotten her Religious Opinions. Forgotten them as completely as if they had never been.

Yet there they were, staring her in the face now. She didn't believe in the God of the Old Testament, or the God of the New Testament; she didn't believe in Jesus or the Trinity, or the resurrection, or any of the other miracles. In the days when Philip had been more her friend than Susan's, they had made up their minds that none of these things were true. He had lent her books, clever books full of arguments *proving* that they were not true. She had been proud and glad to disbelieve what Philip disbelieved, though of course she had formed her opinion quite independently of his. It wasn't true, what Susan had said, that Philip could make her believe or disbelieve anything he liked. No intelligent person, who had examined the evidences with an open mind, could think otherwise. Matty had been quite sure that her mind was open. And, after

opening, it had been very firmly shut again. Where other people had doubts, Matty, little positive Matty, had had certainties. She was persuaded that nothing could shake her disbelief in the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament and in Jesus and the Trinity.

And all this Matty had forgotten.

It was Philip who reminded her. Philip had shut himself up in the smoke-room with her and talked to her like a brother.

"This isn't the sort of thing I thought you'd do," he said. "Do you think you're cut out for a parson's wife?"

"No, I don't. But what does that matter so long as he thinks I am."

"Does the poor chap know? Have you told him you don't believe a single thing he believes?"

"I do believe in God," said Matty.

"Not his sort of God. Have you told him?"

"No," said Matty, "I forgot."

"Forgot, did you? I say, you know, it's pretty important."

"Do you think I ought to tell him?"

"Yes, I do."

"I shall have to do it when he comes. Oh, Philip, do you think he'll mind awfully?"

"I don't suppose he'll like it."

"But do you think it'll make any difference?"

"Do I think he'll chuck you? Not if he's any decency. He may think you ought to have told him at the time."

"I ought. Oh, how could I have forgotten? I feel as if I'd trapped him."

"Oh, no, it isn't as bad as that, Matty."

"It's pretty bad. How *do* you think he'll take it?"

"Can't tell. I suppose he'll try and convert you, and I suppose you'll try and be converted."

"I can't be. I can't think a thing's true when it isn't. And there are things I ought to do that I can't do. I can't say the creeds or the responses, and I can't turn to the East and bow at the name of Jesus, and I can't go to the Sacrament. He wouldn't like having a wife who doesn't go to the Sacrament. For all I know, Philip, it may be so important that he'll break it off."

"No. If he's gone on you, he'll get round it somehow. A parson is a chap who's parted with his intellectual chastity anyway, and he'll make you do the same. "

"He won't. I must be honest even if he does give me up."

There was a knock on the front door. Matty started.

"Oh, Philip, there he is. I shall have to tell him *now*."

"Poor little Matty, don't be so frightened. Perhaps you needn't. You haven't let on to your Mother. You go to church to please her, so you can go to church to please him."

"But not the Sacrament. I don't go to the Sacrament."

"You could, with a mental reservation."

"No, Philip, truth's truth," said Matty. "I must tell him."

She went out. John waited for her in the drawing-room.

She pressed back the arms he put round her and loosed herself from his hold.

"Matty——"

"Sit down, John. No. Not here—there."

He sat down on the chair she indicated. Matty sat on the sofa. She was very solemn.

"I've got something to tell you. Something awful."

He tried to smile. The smile wasn't a success.

"I ought to have told you the other day, before I let you be engaged to me. But I forgot."

He could smile all right now; he knew she wasn't going to break it off.

"What is it, Matty?"

"It's—it's—it's something that I am. You won't like it."

"How do you know I won't?"

"I know. I know. . . . I'm an infidel, John."

John burst out laughing.

"Oh no, you're not. You only think you are."

"But I am. I am. I don't believe a thing that you believe. I don't believe in Jesus. I don't believe in the Trinity. I don't believe in God. Not in your sort of God."

"How do you know what my sort of God is?"

"Well, he's the God of the Bible, isn't he?"

"Yes, he's the God of the Bible. But I don't think

you know what sort of God that is or you would believe in him."

"Do you mind my not believing?"

"I should mind very much if I thought for a moment it was true."

"But it is true. I really don't, and you can't make me."

"I shan't try to make you. Some day you'll do it of your own accord."

"Some day—I don't think so."

"I know it," said John.

"Does it, does it make any difference?"

"Any difference? In what?"

"In your feeling for me. Will it make you not love me?"

"No, Matty, it'll make me love you all the more."

"But—you won't want to marry me?"

"Yes. I shall want to marry you all the more."

"You'll want to, but you won't."

"Why not?"

"Because it'll never do for you to have a wife who doesn't join in the prayers, or bow at the name of Jesus, and who walks out of the Church when the Sacrament comes in. I can't pretend, you know."

"God forbid that you should pretend."

"Truth's truth," said Matty again.

"Yes, truth's truth, and because the things that I believe are true, and because you love the truth I know that some day you'll believe them too. You'll keep your honest, open mind."

"You do see that I want to be honest?"

"Yes, Matty, I see you as you are."

That was all he said then. But when they went for their walk with Tinker in the Regent's Park he came back to it.

"I'm thinking of what you told me, Matty. Let's look at it all round. Perhaps it isn't as complicated as you think."

He meditated. It was all crystal clear to his fiery, unhesitating faith. How was he to make her see it? How was he to make her see the tremendous simplicity of the thing he believed? It seemed to him tremendously simple.

He wasn't going to defend dogma. Dogma, he knew, was a difficult thing; he himself had had his doubts of dogma. Not now, not since his college days; long ago all his doubts had gone down before the passion that possessed him, his ineradicable love of God. Impossible, John thought, not to believe that an infinite and eternal object corresponded with an infinite and eternal passion. Impossible not to believe that infinite and eternal love had become incarnate once for all in Jesus Christ.

"You talked about my sort of God. Well, my sort of God is, literally and definitely, love. He's more than that, but he's love more than anything. For us, for humanity, he's love. Well, just say to yourself that God is love and that if love was in Jesus Christ—and you can't doubt that it was—then God was in him and he was God."

The logic of it seemed to him irrefutable. And it was so simple.

"But love might be in you and me and we shouldn't be God."

"It was perfectly in Jesus, therefore he was perfectly God.

Matty's drowning mind snatched at it.

But no, there was that impossible doctrine of the Incarnation.

As if he knew what she was thinking he said, "Don't bother about anything else."

"Not about Joseph and the Virgin Mary?'

"No. Certainly not about Joseph. And not about the Virgin Mary. It's the Spirit that gives life. Can't you believe that the Spirit gave divine life to Jesus Christ?"

Yes, Matty thought that she could believe that, if you really hadn't got to bother about the Incarnation.

John went on, talking as he walked, with Matty trotting beside him, trying to keep pace with his long stride and with the great reckless jumps of his mind.

All love, he said, was a mystery. "Think, Matty, think what human love is, and think that God's love cannot be less than that." And he said that when they were married, when Matty knew what love was, she would know that love was God and that God was love; she would be there, in the heart of the mystery. That, John said, would do for a beginning. The rest would follow.

Matty wondered.

"Take the Great Central Truth first," said John. Would she think over what he had said?

Half through the night and half through the next morning Matty thought over it.

That God was love, yes, she thought she could believe that; if God was anything at all he must be that; it was the least and the greatest thing that he could be. Then, the next step, the Spirit of God, the Holy Ghost, was the Spirit of Love, and if the Spirit of Love was in Jesus, then Jesus was, in that sense, God. It was clear; it was simple; and John had said that if she could believe this much it would do for a beginning. She couldn't bear not to believe it, couldn't bear that there should be this great difference between her mind and John's; it was a spiritual separation, and separation was agony. And she was desperately anxious to make John happy; so she clutched, desperately, at the Great Central Truth without looking to see whether the rest would follow. John said it would, and if it didn't, Matty thought it would be no great matter.

All through John's two weeks' holiday they had long talks about the life that they would live together, the life that was to lighten Matty's darkness, and about God and the nature of religion, and about prayer. Matty said prayer was illogical. It meant that you made God change his mind. If God was unchangeable, how could you change him? And John said it meant nothing of the sort. It was you and your mind that changed. You gave up your will, and God gave you his will instead; and when you prayed you willed with the new, strong will that was in you, so that your praying was God's willing.

This seemed to Matty a remarkable light on prayer;

she thought it was really rather clever of John to put it that way. And from thinking it rather clever of John she went on to wondering whether there might not be something in it, and from wondering to persuading herself that there *was* something in it. Deliberately, and in order to please John, Matty was cultivating the will to believe. Supposing, supposing it were really true. You could find out whether it was true, John said, by trying the experiment.

One night Matty tried it. She prayed that she might know whether John's belief was true or not.

Nothing happened. She woke up knowing no more than she had known the night before. But she thought, yes, she distinctly thought, that she felt something, a sort of peace and well-being, a sense of everything somehow being safe. If that was enough.

John said it was enough.

And as John was the only person she could talk to about it (for, Heavens! what would Philip have thought of her), the thing became their secret, and religion and the Great Central Truth were mixed up inextricably with her love of John. And so, what with keeping her mind fixed firmly on the Great Central Truth and turning her back completely on Joseph and the Virgin Mary, and not thinking about the Trinity more than she could help, and about the resurrection and the other miracles not at all, step by insidious step, Matty came to persuade herself that she did really believe what John believed.

It never occurred to her that, step by insidious step, her honesty was surrendering. To be sure, there was

the Sacrament; she didn't know how she was ever going to get over the Sacrament which John declared to be essential; but she needn't take that stile until she came to it. Why, it might be years before they were married.

It was three years.

Long before the three years were over Matty's surrender was complete. She was attending Early Celebration. She thought as John thought; or, rather, she had left off thinking.

Philip said it would be a perfect marriage, since Matty had parted with her intellectual chastity.

IV

Things, other than Matty's conversion, happened in the three years following her engagement. First, John became Vicar of Medlicott above Upper Speed, near Wyck-on-the-Hill in the Cotswolds. To be sure, the living was so poor that he was even less able to marry than he had been during his curacy. They would have to wait till he got something better. Medlicott was a stepping-stone.

Then Philip Attwater's two books came out: *Masks*, a thin sheaf of cruel and delightful parodies, and *Things New and Old*, a stout, serious volume of critical essays. Philip was established as a writer to be reckoned with; he was admired by those whose admiration was what he most cared for. People were afraid of him; they found admiration a safe attitude; while Philip, softened by success, grew almost kind.

Next came Susan's marriage, and after that the gradual widening and illuminating of Matty's world. Philip knew all sorts of interesting people, and Philip's little house in Acacia Road became a centre of inspiring contacts; its door was open to Matty and her family, and presently the interesting people overflowed into the Ormonde Terrace house. Matty moved, an accepted person, in the most brilliant circles, among poets —all the poets whom Philip had parodied—painters, composers and politicians, for Philip's net was wide,

and so loose that the smallest fishes dropped through, and only the bigger ones remained, securely landed. There were young, celebrated women who wrote, whose great serious eyes were fixed on Philip as if he had been a god; celebrated men who listened to him with a deference very gratifying to Philip's vanity; young men from the Foreign Office, and members of Parliament, mostly Liberal; there was even an explorer whose *Travels in Thibet* had made a stir—the kind of people whom Matty had once passionately desired to know. The door had opened and they were all coming in; the shining miracle had happened; all around her Matty heard talk of a brilliance so exciting that she could hardly keep her head through it.

It fired her with the spirit of conversational adventure, so that before she knew where she was she was giving out sparks. These wonderful people listened to Mrs. Attwater's little sister as if she had been somebody who mattered; and though she knew she didn't matter, not the least little bit, she was carried away, and it became apparent that in her not particularly distinguished family little Matty was the clever one. Philip and Susan drew her out; they had the air of giving her boundless opportunity.

"You *are* kind to me, you two," she said to Susan.

Susan explained.

"Oh, no, we're not. We want you to see definitely what you're giving up, before the thing's irrevocable."

"But of course it's irrevocable *now*. You don't suppose I should give John up, even for this?"

"You must realize that you can't have both. John can't give you anything like it."

"You want me to see that?"

"So that you don't, darling, go into it with your dear eyes shut."

"You forget that my eyes see something in John that you don't."

"Yes, I think they do. All the same——?"

With that Susan left it to Matty's imagination, the extent of the things that John, whatever she might see in him, couldn't give her.

And Matty, while her head went round and round, felt that for all these whirling coruscations she wouldn't give John's least little commonplace remark. The sound of John's voice was enough in itself to thrill her.

Yet John, commonplace compared with the wonderful people, John, in his sudden brief appearances at Ormonde Terrace, felt intensely the vibration of the inspiring contacts. He sat, thirsty, drinking in the conversation as it poured round him, fizzing and sparkling. John held his own, though his own was perhaps not brilliant; held it sufficiently to draw Philip's fire.

They were talking about Blake, and John's mind that had gone to sleep at Medlicott woke up; he flushed with participation.

"Blake? The greatest Christian poet of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries."

Philip was down on him at once. "Christian? You claim him?"

"I do indeed."

"I'm afraid we can't let you have him. Have you read *The Everlasting Gospel?*"

"I have."

Philip quoted:

> "'Was Jesus born of a virgin pure,
> With narrow soul and looks demure?
> If he intended to take on sin,
> His mother should an harlot have been;
> Just such a one as Magdalen,
> With seven devils in her pen.'

I see nothing particularly Christian about that. It's Nietzschean. Beyond good and evil. Miles beyond all the Christianity that ever was. I don't know whether you can make anything of the Prophetic Books. I can't. Still, I don't imagine that they'll help you much."

No, John couldn't make anything of the Prophetic Books, but he stuck to it that Blake was a Christian, without perhaps knowing it. Christian in the best sense.

"I don't know what your best sense is, but aren't you thinking of Henry Vaughan? They're in the same cheap edition."

"No. I know my Vaughan and I know my Blake."

He quoted in his turn:

> "'I shall not cease from mental fight,
> Nor shall the sword sleep in my hand,
> Till I have built Jerusalem
> In England's green and pleasant land.'"

"Oh, you're one of those people who'd say that Shelley would have been a Christian if he had lived."

"So he would. So he would. He was going that way. Think of Hellas:

> 'A Power from the unknown God,
> A Promethean Conqueror, came;
> Like a triumphal path he trod
> The thorns of death and shame. . . .
> A mortal shape to him
> Was like the vapour dim
> Which the orient planet animates with light.'

And:

> 'Blazoned as on Heaven's immortal noon
> The cross leads generations on.'

If that isn't the doctrine of the Incarnation, what is it?"

"Oh, you'd see the Incarnation in the purest pantheism. You can twist and turn anything to what you want to believe."

Matty struck in.

"Don't, Philip. John doesn't twist and turn things. He goes straight."

"I didn't mean Crawford more than any of them."

"You mean," said John, "parsons generally?"

"Well, isn't it what you're there for?"

"No, it isn't," said John.

Philip was silent. He felt that he had gone too far. He had sinned against courtesy and good taste. Still, if parsons will butt in where they're not wanted they must be prepared to take what they get.

John, too, was silent, and the conversation leaped round him again in the splendour that he had extinguished. He was content to listen. He listened pathetically, patiently, as one holding his mind open to the light, no matter from what queer quarter it might come. His face lit up with pleasure when a good thing was said.

And when it was all over, and he was walking back with Matty from Acacia Road to Ormonde Terrace, he was humble and a little sad.

"Ah," he said, "it was good. Talking to Attwater is like taking a plunge into a cold river on a sweltering day."

"Very cold," said Matty. "Icy."

"Icy, perhaps. But how bracing. How it stimulates the mental circulation. I shall go back to Medlicott twice the fellow I was. I don't know, Matty, that I ought to take you out of it. We can't give you anything like this down in the Cotswolds."

"I don't want this. I want you. You."

"That's sweet of you, dear, but, I'm afraid, after Attwater——"

"Anyhow, you won't plunge me into a cold river."

"Nothing so exhilarating. I'm afraid. Nothing so exhilarating."

"You're all I want," she said, and clung a little tighter to his arm.

Somehow she loved him all the more because he hadn't exactly shone at Philip's party. She felt that he had been somehow exposed there, cruelly, a mark for Philip's unkind intellect, and that he needed, poor

darling, her protection. What would she not have protected him from? More than all she felt that he existed for her alone, he lived a beautiful, secret life in her soul, she alone knew what was in him, his secret beauty; for her he towered above the wonderful people; for her he shone. He, as she knew him, was a man above all other men.

In March, eighteen eighty-five, John rose from his stepping-stone of Medlicott to the living of Wyck-on-the-Hill. The old Rectory was a bigger house than he could keep going on his income, so he took a little house on Lower Speed Hill. As it would not be vacant for another three months, they waited till May to be married, and moved into the house on the hill in June.

An oblong grey stone house looking east, with a flat window on each side of the front door, three flat windows above, a dormer window jutting out in the roof; stairs facing the front door, a little dining-room on the right of the passage, a little drawing-room on the left with a big bow window looking out over the garden and the south; John's study and the kitchen at the back; upstairs, four bedrooms and an attic. What more did they want? Matty loved the house, she loved the view from the bow windows of the drawing-room and the bedroom overhead: the hills of green corn and pinkish fallow and pasture, and yellow charlock, curving off, fanning, the fields divided by grey stone walls and topped by the dark green combs of the plantations. She loved the little grass garden with its straight walks and gay herbaceous borders, purple

and white, crimson and blue, and the espalier fence shutting in the lawn, and she was glad there was a paddock for the pony.

She loved the tall monkey puzzle tree that stood up in the lawn outside the bow windows, with the interlaced tails of its branches hanging, making a thick dark pattern in the sky. She loved her nice imitation Chippendale furniture and the one or two "good pieces," Father's wedding present, that gave distinction to the rooms. Garden and house and all that was in them were hers—hers and John's. She was utterly content.

One after the other, people came calling: the Fieldings from Wyck Manor, the Hawtreys of Medlicott, the Markhams of Wyck Wold, Mrs. Waddington and her son from Lower Wyck, the parsons from Lower Speed, Medlicott, Bassington, Dimsborough, Adlington, Orlestrop, Daunton, Barton-on-the-Water and Barton-on-the-Hill, Winchway, Chipping Kingdon and Norton in Mark, with Alice and Edward from Upper Speed.

And Matty sat and listened to Mrs. Waddington's long stories about her son Horatio, and to Horatio's long stories about himself and the number of miles he had driven and walked and ridden. All Horatio's performances had some quality of wonder. The young Squire of Lower Wyck, floridly and heavily handsome, carried himself at twenty-one with the dignity of sixty; he had the air of unbending to Matty, of being captured by her charm. He paid her little compliments in a thick, emotional voice, and was ponderously genial to

John. If Mr. Crawford liked riding to hounds Waddington could let him have his mare Jenny. There wasn't a mount to beat her in the county. She could fly over her fences like a bird.

And Mr. Hawtrey of Medlicott came with his wife and daughter and talked about the hay harvest and the prospect for the crops, and the fishing at Upper Speed, and about his boy at Cambridge, while his wife talked about her servants and the difficulty of getting any, and about the manners and morals of the villagers. And Colonel Markham of Wyck Wold abused Gladstone's Government and deplored the spread of nonconformity. What with the Liberals and the dissenters, Colonel Markham said, there would soon be neither Church nor State left. As for that fellow Gladstone's foreign policy, it was beneath contempt. In ten years' time England will have ceased to be a nation. Mrs. Markham talked innocently about her baby and said that Matty must come and see him. And Matty said that she would love to.

And Robert Fielding, the Squire of Wyck, came over from the Manor with his beautiful wife Adeline. He talked about his farm and the improvements he was making and the possibility of model farming in the Cotswolds. And because he was inspired by a passionate interest in his subject and not talking for talking's sake Robert Fielding contrived to be interesting. His wife Adeline talked about her garden and the new tennis court and the great bed of delphiniums, and said that Matty must come and see them. And Matty said she would love to.

And Sir John and Lady Corbett of Underwoods came and talked about all the others.

The parsons came and talked about their parishes. They all said that John would have his work cut out for him at Wyck. Edward Farrar complained that in the three years he had been at Upper Speed he had got no nearer to the people, and he advised John not to entertain the hope that he would succeed where other men had failed. The Cotswold peasant, according to Edward, was an exceedingly difficult and unamiable character. You needn't expect a welcome in any of these cottage homes. Edward had only to show himself at the front door for the whole family to fly out at the back. Still, he was lucky compared with John, who would have to fight the publicans; there was no public house in Upper Speed. He might have added that there were no more than seven houses altogether, and that from morning till night he had nothing to do and nothing to think of but his weekly sermons.

And Matty sat and listened to them all. She could see that they liked her. She had a way of making people like her, a way that, with seeming innocence and sincerity and truth, confirmed them in the agreeable idea they had of themselves.

"What do you think of them?" said John, when he had seen the last parson safely through the garden gate.

"Well," said Matty, "they're not very exciting, are they?"

"Not very. But they're kind people, nice kind people. They've been very good to me."

"Then," said Matty, "I'm sure I shall like them."

She was ready to like everything and everybody that came into her wonderful new life with John. If it wasn't very easy to talk to these nice kind people you could at least listen. You just had to have patience, that was all. She herself had felt so stupid when confronted with Sir John and Lady Corbett that she felt it was not for her to be critical. And if at times it struck her that this life would go on and on for ever, and that nothing else could possibly happen to her, and that she didn't know how she was going to bear it, Matty put the thought away from her as a disloyalty to John.

And besides the people from the big houses there were the doctor, and the lawyer, and the banker, and the people from the little houses of Wyck-on-the-Hill and Lower Wyck. And though the trades-people and the farmers did not call, John insisted that they should be called on and asked to tea. And because the Rectory drawing-room was small and only held a few at a time, these tea-parties were frequent, so that everybody should be invited in their turn. And there were always some sick and poor people to be fed and looked after. John and Matty looked after them and fed them. In this place where nothing happened they had something to do every minute of the day. John had fairly let himself go in his three months alone at Wyck-on-the-Hill. He had created for himself and Matty an enormous quantity of things to do.

Besides the established routine of Sunday schools and sewing meetings, he had organised a Men's Club,

a Boys' Club and a Girls' Club, a Coal and Blanket Club and a Boot Club, a Cricket Club and a Football Club, a Bell-ringers' Club and a Fife and Drum band, a lending library, evening classes for men and boys, and monthly teas for the district visitors. He had a Penny Reading, or a Village Concert, once a month instead of once a year. He increased the number of choir practices. He gave out in the Church that henceforth cricket and football might be played on Sunday afternoons. Anything to keep the men out of the public houses. He fought his publicans with cricket and football, with bell-ringing, with lessons in mental-work and wood-carving, with books and music and recitations. He went into the brothels of the Backs and exhorted the prostitutes to a better life. He would sit up all night with any sick person who expressed a wish for his company. He kept the fear of death from the dying. Like a doctor he was ready for a summons at any hour, in any weather. At the ring of the bell or the rattle of earth on his window-pane he would leap from his bed, dress hastily, harness the pony to the governess-cart, and drive himself out to some far-off cottage or farm. Dirt and disease were nothing to John, nothing but the temporary disguises of the immortal spirit within. Sin itself was a disguise that did not deceive him as to the ultimate worth of the being it inhabited. At any minute the divine event might happen and the spirit of love descend into hearts that more often than not he seemed to be calling to in vain. John's hope and belief and patience were infinite. He could wait. He loved these people that were committed to his care;

he never lost that sense that he and Matty shared of their sacred pathos. John would have adored humanity in itself if he had not adored Christ; as it was he adored humanity in Christ.

Sometimes at the end of the day the rector and his wife would sit all evening in the silence of an immense fatigue. John hated to see Matty tired. He reproached himself for having drawn her into a life that was too hard for her.

"You needn't work so furiously, you know," he would say. "Stick to your Sunday school class and leave visiting to the district visitors. That's what they're there for. The parish isn't enough for five, but it's too much for one."

And Matty would answer, "It isn't too much for me. If you can do it, I can."

"That's what I'm not sure of."

"You may be sure. I'm as strong as a horse. It's good for me."

And she would start off the next day on her round. What with the house and the garden, the county and the parish, they had only meal-times and the evenings for each other. They longed for the hour when they drew in their chairs to the lamplit table, and John, when he was not too tired, read aloud to Matty while she worked, or they talked about all they had done and all that they were going to do. They had dreams. Beyond the narrow borders of the parish, they had dreams. Some day, when they had a month's holiday, they would go abroad: they would go to Switzerland; they would go to the South of France, and Italy. Matty

wanted to see Monte Carlo; John didn't, but he said they should take Monte Carlo on their way. They would see Rome and Florence and Siena and Venice and Assisi. John read aloud *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis* and the *Letters of Saint Catherine* against the time when they should visit Assisi and Siena. Every year they would go abroad and come back with minds stored with beautiful impressions that would last them all their lives. Just think, said John, how long you could live on Rome.

They would go next year.

But next year came and they did not go. They couldn't afford it.

V

It was at one of the monthly teas for district visitors that Matty met Grace Minchin.

Just before tea John had taken Matty aside.

"Matty," he said. "I want you to be particularly kind to Miss Minchin."

"Why?"

"Because Miss Minchin has been particularly kind to me."

"I see. You're sorry for her."

"A little. It isn't a very happy soul. I want it to be happy."

Matty smiled.

"Can *I* make Miss Minchin happy?"

"Yes. If you let her feel that she's somebody, that she's wanted. She only needs drawing out."

So Matty gave Miss Minchin a seat on her right hand at the top of the tea-table. John sat at the foot.

Miss Minchin at thirty had lost every appearance of youth, if she had ever had any. You judged that she had been first a baby, then a little girl, but she had never been a young woman. She had long sallow cheeks, a full purse mouth, thick grey eyes bulging from their sockets, hay-coloured hair arranged in an elaborate system of thin flat plaits, and what Matty described to herself as "a bottled-up" expression. She gathered that drawing Miss Minchin out would be a difficult

and dangerous operation, she looked so liable to explode.

But Miss Minchin refused to be drawn. Matty found it almost impossible to attract her attention, it was so riveted on John. If Miss Minchin's eyes wandered for an instant to her tea-cup or her plate they turned to John again with a solemn, protruding, fascinated stare. She replied to Matty's promptings with monosyllabic asides, her head averted. She seemed unable or unwilling to look Matty in the face.

"Have you lived long in Wyck?" said Matty.

"Yes," said Miss Minchin.

"Do you like district visiting?"

"Yes."

"Are you going to the Penny Reading next week?"

"Yes."

"Are you taking any part?"

"No."

"Do you sing?"

"Yes."

"And play?"

"No."

She was not really listening to Matty; she was listening to John, who was talking about the Penny Reading to Mrs. Ransome, the doctor's wife. She treated Matty's innocent questions as if they had been irritating interruptions to her communion with the rector. When the district visitor on her right tried to talk about the weather, Miss Minchin said, "Sh-sh-sh, the rector is speaking."

Matty thought, "I should have put her next to

John if she's to be happy." She turned her attention to Mrs. Caldecott, the landlady of the White Hart Hotel. Mrs. Caldecott was a plump and pretty little woman who smiled with pleasure every time you spoke to her.

"So kind of you to have us all like this, Mrs. Crawford."

"Oh, no, I want so much to know you all and I thought this would be a good way."

"The Penny Readings are a great success."

"Aren't they? I'm so glad."

"I'm sure the villagers ought to be very grateful. They never had so much done for them in the late rector's time."

"Oh, well, my husband wants to do more for them than just bore them in the pulpit."

At that Miss Minchin turned her head towards Matty and spoke.

"Mr. Crawford doesn't bore anybody in the pulpit."

"No," said Matty, "he isn't there long enough."

"I hope," said John, "if I do bore anybody they'll let me know."

Miss Minchin turned to Matty a dismissive profile and fixed on John a look of adoring exaltation.

"Oh dear," thought Matty, "I wonder if John knows what's the matter with the poor thing?"

"I have never heard anything like last Sunday's sermon," said Miss Minchin. "It must have been difficult to preach from that text. When you gave it out I wondered what on earth you'd find to say about it."

"He did it," said Matty, "because it was difficult, to prove what he could do. He was showing off abominably."

John's text had been Jeremiah xxxviii. 11: "And Ebed-melech the Ethiopian said unto Jeremiah, Put now these old cast clouts and rotten rags under thine armholes under the cords. And Jeremiah did so."

"Yes," said John, "it was all my swagger. I wanted to avoid an obvious and hackneyed text. But I was wrong. People like to hear the dear old hackneyed texts, something that they know already. It's easier to remember. I'll never do it again."

"Well," said Miss Minchin, "you were wonderful."

"I wasn't. I was just a conceited fellow trying to show what I could do. And not doing it very well. I shall burn that sermon."

"Don't burn it. Give it to me," said Miss Minchin.

"No. I might give you Keble's *Christian Year*, or Drummond's *Natural Law in the Spiritual World*, or a bound volume of *Punch*, but not one of my worst sermons. That isn't the way to repay kindness."

Miss Minchin's purse mouth untied itself in acknowledgment of the rector's joke.

After tea, Mrs. Ransome, a genial and robust woman, rose and made her little speech, the little speech that provoked Miss Minchin's memorable demonstration.

"I have been requested by the members of the sewing-party to make an announcement. There has been a change in the parish—a very delightful change—I mean the presence among us of our rector's wife. In the old days, as there was no lady at the Rectory, Miss Minchin

very kindly consented to be the head of our little sewing-party. We now feel that it is only right and fitting—Miss Minchin herself feels that it is only right and fitting—that our rector's wife should take this position, and that the sewing-parties should in future be held, with the rector's and Mrs. Crawford's consent, at the Rectory and not, as before, in Miss Minchin's house. Mrs. Caldecott, Miss Iles and Miss Begbie, do you agree?"

Mrs. Caldecott, Miss Iles and Miss Begbie said "Certainly" all at once.

"What do Mr. and Mrs. Crawford say?"

"Mr. Crawford," said John, "says it rests with Miss Minchin."

"And Mrs. Crawford," said Matty, "says that she wouldn't dream of taking Miss Minchin's place. If anybody is head it should be Miss Minchin who has been in it for so long."

"And I," said Miss Minchin, "should not dream of staying where I am not wanted, or of occupying a position that belongs to the rector's wife. I shall resign from the sewing-party altogether."

If Miss Minchin had flung a bomb among them Mrs. Ransome, Mrs. Caldecott, Miss Iles and Miss Begbie could not have been more dismayed.

"My dear Miss Minchin," they said all together.

"My dear Miss Minchin," said Mrs. Ransome, "impossible. You can't resign. We can't do without our cutter-out."

"I have no doubt," said Miss Minchin, "that Mrs. Crawford can cut out."

"I can't," said Matty. "I never cut anything out

in my life. Please, Miss Minchin, stay and be head. I wouldn't for the world have any change."

"No," said Miss Minchin, firmly, "I will not be head. The sewing-party does not wish me to be head."

"But stay, stay and cut out for us."

"Mrs. Ransome can cut out."

"Not as *you* can, dear Miss Minchin."

"No," said Miss Minchin. "I am not indispensable, and I have too much to do already with the girls' evening classes and my district. Mrs. Crawford can please herself about being head, I shall not be it. I will not push myself in where I am not wanted."

"I think you might stay," said Mrs. Ransome, "when we're all imploring you. Doesn't that show that you're wanted? Mr. Crawford—*ask* her to stay."

John said, "Please stay, Miss Minchin. Head or no head, we can't do without you."

But unfortunately as he said it he caught Matty looking at him and he smiled, iniquitously. For the life of him he couldn't help it, the whole affair was so silly. Miss Minchin saw that smile and understood that the rector considered her absurd. She might have consented to be deposed from her rightful position and to submit to Mrs. Crawford—who couldn't cut out—as head, but to be laughed at by the rector, whose right hand she had been, whom she had toiled for with such ardour, such devotion, for whom she had done more than Mrs. Ransome, Mrs. Caldecott, Miss Iles and Miss Begbie put together, that was more than she could bear. If Miss Minchin's thoughts could have been articulate they would have run something like

this: Yes, I may tramp for miles on his errands, I may work my fingers to the bone for him, I may go fasting every time to Early Celebration, and without a word about it to anybody he goes off and comes back married to the first silly little girl who throws herself at his head. And she is everything and I am nothing. A little girl with thick eyebrows that meet at the top of her nose. A sign of coarseness. Well, he could see that *she* wasn't any longer at his beck and call. She had a soul she could call her own.

"Head or no head," said Miss Minchin, "I shall not stay. Good afternoon, Mr. Crawford. Good afternoon. Good afternoon." She shook hands with the rector and Matty, and bowed stiffly to the others and went out. John followed her to the garden gate.

"Oh dear," said Matty, "what am I to do? What *is* the matter with her?" (She knew.)

"It's nothing but spite," Mrs. Ransome said. "Because we asked you to be head instead of her."

"Nothing but spite," said Miss Iles and Miss Begbie. The landlady of the White Hart Hotel smiled at Matty in amiable sympathy.

"I'm sure I don't want to be head or anything," said Matty.

"Well, you can't turn her. If she can't be head she'll be nothing. And all the sewing-party wants you and doesn't want her. We'd have got rid of her long ago, because of her domineering ways, only she was too useful. After all, my dear," said Mrs. Ransome, "you're the rector's wife, and she knows it."

"She does indeed," said Miss Iles with meaning.

She was a thin, dry, dark woman, with sharp eyes, still young at thirty-five.

"It's a pity," said Miss Begbie, "because she really can cut out."

"And I really can't," said Matty. "But I could learn. I could take lessons."

"That," said Mrs. Ransome, "would be very sweet of you. Don't you worry about Miss Minchin."

And presently they all left.

"Oh, John," said Matty, when he came back from the garden gate. "Isn't it awful?"

"I think it's very silly."

"Oh—silly, it's imbecile. But do you think I ought to take her place?"

"Yes, if she won't have it."

"But if it made her happy——"

"Depend upon it she's just as happy flying into a temper and asserting her independence. If you haven't enjoyed the afternoon she has."

"Oh, John, perhaps she isn't enjoying it now. Perhaps she's feeling all sick and sorry and torn inside. The *poor* thing."

"Yes, poor thing."

"John, how she hates me."

"Hates you? Why should she hate you?"

"Because she thinks I've taken her place."

"Well, you have, haven't you?"

"I don't mean that. I don't suppose she cares a rap about the silly sewing-party, really. The sewing-party's a scapegoat, I mean, a safety-valve. Don't you know what's the matter with her?"

"No, I'm blessed if I do."

"She's in love with you, John."

"Nonsense. You musn't think those things, Matty."

"I can't help thinking them."

"You musn't say them, then."

"I wouldn't say them to anybody but you."

"But can't you see, darling, that it's just to me you oughtn't to have said it. You're giving the poor thing away."

"Then you do think it yourself?"

"No, I don't think it myself."

"But, my dear, where are your eyes? Can't you see where *hers* are all the time? It simply sticks out of her. Why shouldn't I say she's in love with you? I don't blame her. I don't see how she can help it. I'm in love with you myself. And I daresay the others are, too—Miss Iles and Miss Begbie—only they don't let on."

"Oh, yes, every woman that looks at him is in love with your precious husband, according to you."

"I shouldn't wonder. And of course she hates me when she thinks I've taken you from her."

"Well, Matty, you must be so kind to her that she loves you."

"You dear. You must know precious little of women if you think it's *my* kindness she wants."

"Never mind, be nice to her. Be nice."

"*That's* why you were sorry for her. *That's* why you asked me to be kind to her. You old humbug, you knew all the time."

"No, Matty, one doesn't know these things."

"Doesn't one?"

"No, one just has a horrible creepy fright in one's bones."

"That's knowing. But if one's as nice as you are one never owns up. Well, I'll be kind to her; as kind as she'll let me be."

But Matty found that it wasn't easy to be kind to Miss Minchin. In the first place she hardly ever saw her; for, though Miss Minchin was always calling at the Rectory, it was always to see John. She was always trumping up excuses, somebody ill, or somebody behaving badly. George Ballinger going to the public-house again, Bill Jakes bullying his wife, Mrs. Pullin quarrelling with her mother-in-law, the children sniggering at Church and Sunday school, a nasty bit of scandal going round the parish—things, Miss Minchin insisted, that the rector ought to know. And John, with his eternal patience, received her every time and listened to her tale. Once he had appealed to Matty to protect him: "Couldn't you see her instead of me?" and Matty had answered, "No, I won't. That isn't the way to make her love me." Matty didn't like to see John worried, and yet she wasn't sorry to know that Grace Minchin worried him. He had brought it on himself by being kind to her, and now he must go through with it.

And once (it was when Grace had told him about the school-children sniggering) he became impatient and broke out: "If they *do* snigger I can't help it. I don't give them anything to snigger at. You must keep 'em in order." And once, when she came rolling on her

tongue a more than usually luscious scandal, he lost his temper altogether and said he didn't want to hear any more. This backbiting was damnable.

"I'm only telling you that you may put it down," said Miss Minchin, terrified.

"You can put it down yourself by not listening to it." And Miss Minchin cried, and John said he was sorry if he had been harsh, but really, there *was* a limit. And to make up for it he asked Miss Minchin to stay for tea, and Miss Minchin stayed and was unpleasant to Matty.

"What is the use," said Matty, "of my being kind to her? And if she's a scandal-monger——"

"She isn't. She doesn't wallow in scandal for scandal's sake."

"You mean it's only an excuse for seeing *you?*"

He laughed. "I'm afraid so."

Soon after that Alice and Edward called. They had come with a piece of good advice for Matty.

"If I were you," said Alice, "I wouldn't take up too many things."

"Nobody'll thank you," said Edward.

"I don't want anybody to thank me. What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Alice, "that that's what people are saying."

"About me?"

"Yes, that you take too much on yourself. You don't want it said that the rector's wife has her finger in every pie."

"Is that what they say, Edward?"

"Yes, I'm afraid it is."

"I think I know who says it."

"So do I," said Alice.

"Grace Minchin, wasn't it?"

"Well, yes, if you ask me, it was."

"I suppose it's because she thinks I took her sewing-party from her."

"Did you?"

"No. She dropped it. She won't touch it?"

"But that's because you were made head. I should have refused if I'd been you."

"I did refuse. I refused till I was black in the face. But they made me. They all said I had to, because I was the rector's wife. It's all so silly, so silly."

"Well, I don't suppose you could help it. As for that Miss Minchin, it's pure jealousy. Everybody knows she wanted John for herself."

"You shouldn't say that, Alice," said Matty, remembering John's rebuke.

"Well, but it was the talk of the parish. She ran after him in the most shameless way."

"Dear old John wouldn't see it. And if he did he wouldn't let on. And he'd hate to have it talked about."

"Oh, Edward and I don't talk, my dear."

"I hope you won't," said Matty.

It made her feel hot all over to think of poor Miss Minchin loving John and giving herself away and being talked about.

And it was all so silly, so silly. Alice and Edward were silly, Miss Minchin was silly. She didn't know

how she was going to live in all this silliness. She was sorry for Miss Minchin and she had tried to be kind to her. She had asked her to tea twice when John was at home and to supper after the Penny Reading. Yet here was Miss Minchin saying things about her. Her "finger in every pie." What was the use of being kind to people if they behaved to you like that?

"It doesn't make them any better, John."

"No. The use is to ourselves. It makes us better. And who knows, perhaps in time, even poor Grace——"

Meanwhile Miss Minchin became so unpleasant that Susan and Philip noticed it when they came to stay at the Rectory in September.

"Miss Minchin would like to tear you limb from limb, Matty," said Susan.

"She's longing for the day when Matty will get ill and die and John will marry her," said Philip.

And Matty laughed and said again, "Poor thing."

It would be awful, she thought, to love John, and see him married to somebody else. If he had married Grace Minchin, she would have hated Grace.

She must go on being kind. To be kind, kind, that was the only thing.

VI

JOHN was visiting in the parish, Susan was in the drawing-room typing an article for Philip. Matty and Philip were alone in John's study, talking.

"Well, Matty, has John converted you yet?"

Matty lifted her head high.

"If you mean, do I believe what he believes? Yes, I do."

"Oh no, you don't," he said. "You don't believe that Jesus Christ was the son of a virgin."

"John says it doesn't matter about the Virgin."

"Oh, doesn't it? He says he believes it twice every Sunday."

"He says only one thing matters, what he calls the Great Central Truth."

"And what is the Great Central Truth? It sounds like a railway."

"It's simply this. All God is love; love is in Jesus Christ; therefore God is in Jesus Christ. You can't pick a hole in the reasoning."

"No. It's a correct syllogism in the mood Barbara. But it's clergyman's sophistry all the same."

"Sophistry?"

"Yes. I doubt if the major premise is true, to begin with. God isn't love. Think of the awful things that happen in the world. Think of the Mahdi's troops cut to pieces in the name of the God of love.

Think of all wars and earthquakes and plagues and disgusting diseases and fleas and murders and cruelties. Does it look as if God was love? Think of the horrible things men and women do to each other and to children; that he makes them do."

"He?"

"Yes, since he's made them what they are."

"Yet there's love in the world. Anyhow, God loves *in us*."

"It's the only part of the world then where he does love. All the love in the world, all the goodness, comes from us, not him. If he exists at all."

"Oh, Philip, don't you believe there is a God?"

"There may be some sort of Absolute Being. If there is, he's beyond good and evil, beyond pain, beyond love and pity."

"Then he's horrible. I know God isn't like that."

"You don't. Nobody does. You don't know anything about him, anything at all. Why can't you be humble and truthful and say you don't know?"

"Do you think I'm not truthful?"

"I think that if God is anything he's truth. And I think you've lost the innocence of mind that sees God, that sees truth."

"It doesn't matter about my not seeing truth. What matters is deceiving John."

"No. It doesn't matter a bit about your deceiving John; what matters is your not seeing truth. Yet you do see it. You know, deep down in your heart, you know you don't believe the things you say you believe."

She had a sickening feeling that what Philip said

was true. Bit by bit the fabric that she had built up out of subterfuges, out of sophistries, out of her own desires, in darkness and in blindness, was breaking away under her feet. When she looked deep down into her heart she saw that she didn't believe the things she said and believed that she believed. Deep down where her inmost thoughts were. But she would never have seen it if Philip hadn't come. She wished he hadn't come, or having come, that he had let her alone.

She cried out. "I did believe. Why do you come and take it all away from me?"

"Because, Matty, I want to give you back your innocence."

"Ah, do I know whether I'm innocent or not? It isn't as if I could be certain of anything."

"Then say honestly, I'm not certain, and leave it there."

"But I can't leave it there. I want—I want to be certain."

"You can't be."

"John's certain."

"And John doesn't know. He doesn't know any more than the rest of us. If he was honest he'd say so."

"You shall not say John isn't honest. You shall not. John is more honest than anybody I ever knew."

"Oh, I know he thinks he knows."

"Whether he's right or wrong, I'd rather be him than you. I wouldn't be you for the whole world."

"Why not? I'm free. My mind's free. There aren't any shut doors for it. It can go where it likes.

I'm not afraid of anything; above all, not of any thought."

"I should say all the doors were shut for you. All the doors that matter."

"You don't say it, Matty. John says it. You're nothing but a little John, a little clergyman when you talk like that."

"I don't want to talk any more," she said.

"Very well, I'll go and see what Susan's doing."

He went.

When John came back he found her crying.

His arms were round her.

"Matty—what is it? Matty, my love, my dear, what is it?"

"Something Philip's been saying——" She stopped.

"What has Philip said?"

"Why, that I don't believe the things I say I believe. And it's true. I've been deceiving you all the time, pretending——"

"Philip says that?"

"Yes. He says I've l-l-lost the innocence of my mind, so that I can't see the truth."

"Not his truth. But, darling, there's only one truth that matters and you do see it. The Great Central——"

Matty smiled. It did sound like a railway. But she cried as she smiled.

"No. The awful thing is that God isn't love. How can he be when he makes hideous things happen?"

John's face darkened. That was the question he had asked himself a hundred times. He really did not know how to answer it.

Matty went on. "And if God isn't love there isn't any God at all."

"Yes. If God isn't love there isn't any God at all. But, Matty, He *is* love. The wonderful thing about love is that it brings good out of evil. Out of evil comes the greatest good."

"It's awful to think of God making evil just to show how wonderful he is."

"He doesn't make it. He only lets it happen for some great loving purpose that we can't see."

"I can't believe in a great loving purpose that I can't see."

"You must believe in it. I should go mad if I didn't. Without it the whole world would be a madman's dream. Evil comes from man's free will and from the free will of the devil, but it's better that man and the devil should be free than that they should be bound even to be good—wound up like watches to go right. By overcoming evil, here and now, some day we shall be free only to be good. If there is a God. But if there isn't a God, then we are tied to evil for ever and ever. The world without God can never be free to be good. The problem of evil is terrible, however we look at it, but it's worse, infinitely worse on any theory that leaves God out."

"It's worse if you leave him in, because then he becomes evil."

"No, Matty, he's above and beyond it."

"Philip said he might be, only he said he would be beyond love and pity too."

"Not beyond love and pity. Can you think that we

can feel love and pity and he not? And do you think that finite creatures could conceive the idea of infinite love if they had not received it from an infinite being? It's not thinkable."

As John spoke something rose up in Matty's heart like a great wave of peace, flooding her. She was safe and at peace as long as John's voice went on. It went on for some considerable time. John repeated himself; he never got an inch beyond his Great Central Truth; he skimmed lightly but dangerously over the thin ice of the problem of evil, and avoided altogether the subjects of the resurrection and the virgin birth, but his repetitions soothed her, hypnotised her like an incantation. She didn't criticise his argument. She wanted so intensely to believe what he believed that by the time John had finished she was again almost persuaded that she did believe it. On one point she was determined: that she would never again allow herself to talk to Philip about religion.

They went in to Philip and Susan in the drawing-room, and John took Philip away into his study and talked to him, leaving Matty with Susan.

"I hope," Matty said, "you're not being bored frightfully down here."

"We're not bored, because we're with you. But it must be terrible for you, dear. How can you stand it, month after month?"

"I don't mind because I've got John."

"Yes, but so little John and so much parish, and

all the awful things you've got to do. Don't you loathe parish work?"

"I couldn't do it for anybody but John. But no, seeing that it's for John, I don't loathe it. And I love the poor people. I couldn't stand it if I didn't. Though I suppose I'd have to. I'm a parson's wife, you see, and I must do what a parson's wife ought to do. You needn't be sorry for me."

"I can't help being sorry for you. I can't bear to think of you stuck here in this hole with those dreadful Waddingtons and Hawtreys and people, and that Minchin woman."

"Oh, well, I just try to see how funny they are, that's all. They *are* funny."

"But don't you miss the parties and things and all the heavenly talks we used to have?"

"Oh, yes, I miss them sometimes. But there's so much, so much to make up. I don't think you realise, Susan, what an angel John is."

"I shouldn't like to be married to an angel. Doesn't he ever do anything nice and human and wrong?"

"Oh, yes, he flies into tempers, sometimes."

"With you?"

"No. Never with me. Oh, Susan, can't you *see* that I'm happy?"

"Yes, I do believe you are. That's the queer part of it."

And John in the study talked to Philip.

"Philip," he said, "why can't you leave that poor

child alone? She was settled down and happy before you came and disturbed her."

"She was going to sleep and I waked her up. It's better to be awake than asleep."

"Yes, it's better to be awake than asleep. I'd rather her eyes were open. But think of the harm you might have done."

"Damage to her faith? She'd precious little faith left to damage."

"More than you think. More than you think."

"Not she. She was humbugging herself, and you."

"Well, she'll never humbug either of us again. We've faced her doubts. Had them all boldly out in the open. Open-eyed."

"If you want her eyes open, I've opened them. But you can't have it both ways."

"Of course I want her eyes open. She's got to go through with it. But she'll come out. She'll come out on the other side some day. Only I think now that I should let her alone, Philip."

"You're afraid, are you?"

"No. Not afraid in the least. But her mind is very sensitive."

"I was trying to make it so."

"Leave it alone. Leave it alone. You can go too far. You can make it impossible for her to see the truth at all."

"The truth? *The* truth isn't to be seen. There's only your truth and my truth, and I suppose, if she knew anything about it, there might be such a thing as

Matty's truth. You want your truth and Matty's truth to be the same, don't you?"

"I don't. I want God's truth and Matty's truth to be the same."

"There you are again. What do any of us know about God's truth, or God's anything?"

"We don't know, that's why some of us believe."

"Seems a queer reason. Do you know it beats me how *you* manage to believe the things you do. You're honest, you're extremely intelligent, and yet——"

"And yet I'm a Christian. Well, Philip, perhaps it's partly because for me and a good many of us, Christianity isn't so much a creed to be stated as a life to be lived. It's a personal experience or it's nothing."

Philip thought: "He changes his tack the minute you get him."

"You can't wriggle out of it that way. A personal experience is just a personal experience. It has no objective value."

"I'm not sure. We assume certain things to be true, we act as if they were true. We work on a pure assumption, and the assumption is proved *laborando*. The experience has a working value, an objective value."

"I thought that was where you'd turn up."

"Now I want Matty to have that personal experience. I would like you to have it, too. My whole life-work is simply this—to make that experience possible to people who haven't had it yet."

"Do you think, you'll succeed?"

"Here and there, yes. It isn't easy."

"I should say not."

"Will you promise me, Philip, that as long as you're in this house you'll say nothing to Matty that will make my task more difficult?"

"Oh, I'll promise all right."

"Remember, it's intellectual play to you, but it's death to Matty."

"Oh, no, she won't die of it. She has doubts when she talks to me, and she has beliefs when she talks to you. I'll see that you get the last word."

He thought: "He *is* afraid, and no wonder."

John wasn't afraid, but he knew Matty was.

VII

Two years passed. Matty measured time by the Church's calendar, the four Sundays in Advent; Christmas, Epiphany and the Six Sundays after Epiphany; the five Sundays in Lent, Passion Week, Good Friday, Easter and the five Sundays after, Whit-Sunday, Trinity, and the twenty-five Sundays after Trinity; then Advent again. The year was divided into three parts by the three great days of church decoration: Easter, Harvest, and Christmas.

In the garden the year showed its passing in flower after flower: snowdrops, primroses and primulas, violets and daffodils; then roses, larkspurs, lupins, phlox, snapdragon, sweet William and Canterbury bells; then dahlias, asters and chrysanthemums; then the sad, bare winter beds. And on the hills the young bright green corn, the shining metallic green of the turnips; then the red gold wheat, the white gold oats and barley; then sallow stubble and the pinkish brown ploughed lands.

And winter and summer, wet or fine, the district visiting went on. Matty knew every father, mother and child in the parish; she knew every disease and ailment—Mrs. Trinder's rheumatism, Bob Mabbitt's paralysis, Polly Trinder's heart, and old Ballinger's bronchitis; and all the bad legs and the sore heads, the toothaches, the coughs and colds. Soups, puddings,

joints of meat, pounds of butter and packets of tea went from the Rectory to the houses of the very poor. The parish was one enormous family that had to be kept going out of John's stipend and his tithes.

Then for a time Matty left off visiting, and on St. Bartholomew's Day, August twenty-fourth, eighteen eighty-seven, her little girl was born.

They called her Millicent.

> "'Ride a cock-horse
> To Banbury Cross,
> To see a fine lady get on a white horse,
> With rings on her fingers and bells on her toes,
> And *she* shall have music wherever she goes.'"

When Matty came to "rings" she spread out the baby's tender, mottled fingers one by one, and when she came to "bells" she pinched, very gently, the baby's toes. And the baby chuckled. It jerked out a sound like "Gugg-gugg" in time to the prancing of Matty's knee.

"What nice noises it makes," said John. He was never tired of looking at the baby.

"Boofoo noises, boofoo noises Babykins makes. Babykins will be talky-talking soon. Say Dada. Say Dada."

The baby made another noise in its throat, wild, primeval and impolite. John laughed.

"Say it's rude of Daddy to laugh when I can't help it. Naughty Daddy. S'ocking Daddy, he is."

And Matty hid her face in the nape of the baby's neck and gurgled "Goog-goog-goog."

The baby was adorable, with dark down curling in little duck's tails all over its head. It lay on its back and looked at them with solemn, dark, meditative eyes.

"There's wisdom in those eyes," said Matty.

"Wind, more likely," said John; but he adored the baby.

"Nonsense, he s'ouldn't say such things. She's the cleverest, sweetest, duckiest Baby-wee that ever was."

So it went on, day after day. The baby stretched its legs and waved its arms, and in the fulness of time it turned over on its stomach and made swimming movements on the floor. In the warm summer days of eighteen eighty-eight a rug was spread out on the lawn under the monkey puzzle tree, and it swam there, over the brown lake of the rug. Presently it began to crawl, travelling with incredible speed over the rug to the grass and the flower beds, where it grabbed every flower within its reach. Then Matty had to catch it and bring it back to the rug, when it began all over again. It never cried when you caught it. It was as good as gold.

Then, after many efforts, clutching at things and getting up and sitting down suddenly, it began, wonderfully, to walk, and still more wonderfully, to talk. Then in June of eighteen eighty-nine, it ceased to be the baby.

Matty's boy, Derek, was born.

And again this little pig went to market and this little pig stayed at home, and the cock-horse rode to Banbury Cross, and Matty saw a ship a-sailing, a-sail-

ing on the sea, and it was full of pretty things for Baby and for me; but no nursery rhymes soothed or interested Derek. While Millicent remained as good as gold, Derek's whole being rose up against life in passionate resentment and revolt. He cried when you sang to him, he cried when you put him to bed at night and when you took him up in the morning. He cried in his bath; he fought savagely with his little vests and petticoats and things; it was a miracle, Matty said, that he was ever dressed at all. And when he sat up in her arms and she implored him to look at "the pitty f'owers and pic'ures" he hid his face on her shoulder and cried. His very stomach revolted and his teething was one long tragedy. Night after night, John walked up and down the bedroom, holding the screaming baby in his arms, while Matty, worn out with the struggles of the day, tried to sleep.

Yet Matty and John loved the troublesome, fretful Derek more than they loved Millicent. They didn't know that they loved him more, but when Millicent came and laid her treasures, flowers, leaves and pebbles, in her mother's lap, in the very act of kissing her, Matty's eyes would turn to the rug where baby Derek sprawled, making angry, scolding noises as he tried to "swim." Somehow Derek's swimming and his crawling and his walking and talking, when at last he walked and talked, were more wonderful than Millicent's had been. And the baby was more beautiful than Millicent; he had blue eyes and light-brown hair and a dusky-fair skin, mixing Matty's mother's blonde with Matty's darkness. Millicent's features were soft

and snub, but Derek's were exquisitely carved. His beauty, they said, was made to last.

Three years passed; Millicent was five and Derek was three.

Round the lamp-lit table, when the day's work was done, John and Matty sat and talked about their children.

"Dear little Milly, I shan't have any trouble with her, but what am I to do with darling Derry?"

"He'll grow out of it," said John, "when he's stronger. He's a delicate baby, that's all."

"He's just a bundle of nerves," said Matty.

"Well, great things have been done with bundles of nerves. Where there are nerves there'll be brains."

"You think he's going to *be* something?"

"I shouldn't wonder," said John.

They saw Millicent growing up, gentle and good, giving no trouble, her mother's sweet daughter, living on at the Rectory, loving them, glad to be with them, until somebody came and took her away and married her. They talked about the comfort she would be to them, so gentle, so good. They saw Derek growing up, going out into the world, making his way by sheer force of genius, being something, they didn't know what, but something big. Behind the slightly bulging forehead, behind the wonderful, the spiritual blue eyes, they divined an intellect, expanding, pushing, irritating the weak nerves by its imperious domination.

When Derek was slow at learning his letters, slower than Millicent had been, they said big minds took longer to develop; when he cried over his lessons they

said he was tired and must leave off and not be pushed past his strength.

Milly looked up from her Catechism. Two years had passed and she was seven now.

"Why must he leave off and I go on, Mummy?"

"Because you're strong and he isn't."

"He is, Mummy, only he doesn't *like* lessons and I do."

"Then go on."

" 'My duty towards my neighbour is to love him as myself, and to do unto all men as I would they should do unto me: To love, honour and succour my father and mother: To honour and obey the Queen and all that are put in authority under her: To submit myself to all my governors, teachers, spiritual pastors and masters: To order myself lowly and reverently to all my betters——' Who are my betters, Mummy?"

"All who are older and wiser than you are."

"You and Daddy?"

"Me and Daddy."

"Are your betters older and wiser than you and Daddy?"

"Wiser, not older."

"Why not older if mine are older than me?"

"Because we're grown up enough and you're only a little thing."

"Am I Derek's better because I'm older and wiser than him?"

"You mustn't set yourself up to be better, darling."

"No, but if I am?"

"You won't be if you think you are."

"But, Mummy, you and Daddy think you're better than me."

"We don't think it, so long as you're good."

"Then why must I think it?"

"That's a different thing, dear."

"I don't see that it's different."

"Go on with your Catechism. 'To hurt nobody——'"

" 'To hurt nobody by word or deed: To be true and just in all my dealing: To bear no malice nor hatred in my heart: To keep my hands from picking and stealing and my tongue from evil speaking, lying and slandering: To keep my body in temperance, soberness and chastity——' What's chastity, Mummy?"

Matty blushed. The child was really dreadful to-day. But so good, so good.

"Cleanness," said Matty.

"Why is your face so red, Mummy?"

"Is it red?"

"Yes, all up in your hair."

"I don't know why, darling. Supposing you finish instead of asking questions."

Milly finished, quickening her pace to make up for lost time. " 'Not to covet nor desire other men's goods; but—to—learn—and—labour—truly—to—get—my—own—living—and—to—do—my—duty—in—that—state—of—life—into—which—it—shall—please God—to—call—me.' There."

"I think," said Matty that night. "I 'm going to be afraid of Milly."

"Why?"

"Because she asks questions."

"All children ask questions. Wait till Derry begins."

"John—where shall we go in August?"

"What do you say to Swanage again? The children like the sand."

And when August came they went to Swanage again.

In the nine years that they had been married they hadn't gone abroad yet. They still talked about it, about Rome and Florence and Venice and Siena and Assisi.

"Some day, when the children have left school, we'll go. We shall enjoy it all the more for waiting."

Meanwhile they had got to save up for the children's education: Cheltenham for Derek, and the Girls' College, Cheltenham, for Millicent.

VIII

"Come, Derry, say your hymn and let Mother tuck you up."

Derek sat up in bed, his eyes shone and he was smiling. He smiled adorably, with dark-blue eyes curling at the corners. But he was naughty. He wouldn't say his hymn.

"I don't want to say my hymn, Mummy. Nasty old hymn."

"Derry, that's naughty."

"I don't care."

"Say it after me. 'Gentle Jesus . . . '"

"I don't like gentle Jesus."

"Oh, Derry. Do you want to make Mother unhappy?"

"Yes, I do." He looked up in her face and laughed and kicked off the bed-clothes.

"No, you don't. You want to be a good, good boy and say your hymn to please Mother. Come, Mother's tired of waiting."

"No," said Derry, "I say *No.*"

"Do you want Milly to say your hymn for you?"

Sometimes the prospect of Milly saying his hymn for him would bring Derry round; it shamed him. But not this evening. This evening he was dead to shame. He shook his head with an air of wisdom, as much as to say he saw through that old trick.

"Come, Milly, and say his hymn."

Milly came. She stood very straight and stiff with her chin up and her hands clasped behind her back, and chanted, in a righteous voice:

> "'Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
> Look upon a little child,
> Pity my simplicitee,
> Suffer me to come to thee.'"

"Now, Derry, see if you can say it as well as Milly says it."

"Shan't say it."

And Matty couldn't make him.

He would have to be punished. But it was the end of the day and there was nothing left to tell him that he couldn't do. She couldn't refuse to kiss him good night, that punishment would be too terrible. But she could, yes, she could take his elephant away from him, the elephant who slept every night with Derry in his bed.

"Very well, Derry; you're a naughty little boy and Mother will have to take Jumbo from you."

"Don't care. Don't like Jumbo. Nasty Jumbo. Nasty Jesus."

No, after that Matty couldn't kiss him good night as if nothing had happened. For the supreme sin the supreme punishment.

"Mother can't kiss you good night, Derry, unless you say you're sorry for that naughty thing you said."

"Not sorry."

Then Matty began to tuck him up, but as fast as she tucked he kicked and made tents of the bed-clothes and hid under them.

"He is naughty, Mother, isn't he?" said Milly.

"You mustn't take any notice, darling."

"*I'm* not naughty, am I, Mother?"

"No, you've been a good little thing to-day."

Milly held her chin up again; her whole manner proclaimed her consciousness of being good.

"Mother's going, Derry."

'Go," said Derry. "I don't care."

And Matty went, without kissing him. He lay there, kicking, till Nurse came and tucked him up. He lay still for Nurse.

"Now why," said Matty, "should he lie still for Nurse when he won't lie still for me?"

"Nurse has a way with her," said John. "I don't think you're firm enough with him, dear."

"I was firm. I wouldn't kiss him."

"Was he as bad as all that?"

"Yes, he was as bad as all that."

"Oh, well, wait a bit. He'll come round. He'll start howling in another minute."

And sure enough he did when Nurse had pulled down the blinds and gone and he found himself alone. He yelled out, "Mummy, Mummy, I want you."

Matty went to him. She bent over him and he clung to her, crying passionately.

"Oh, Mummy, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I wish I hadn't said Nasty Jesus and Nasty Jumbo. Poor Jumbo, do you think he minds?"

"I think Jesus minds, darling."

"And Jumbo? I shouldn't like Jumbo to mind. Do you think he heard me say I didn't like him?"

"No, darling, I don't think he heard."

"I do like him. May I have him, now I'm sorry?"

"Yes, you may have him."

Derry hugged his elephant to his sorrowing breast.

"He knows I'm sorry now."

Matty whispered: "Tell Jesus you're sorry."

"I'm sorry, Jesus. Now *he* knows. Did you mind, Mummy?"

"Yes, darling, it hurts Mummy and makes her very unhappy when you're naughty."

"I'll never be it again. Kiss me."

Matty kissed him.

Oh, how she loved him with his sudden funny naughtiness, his sudden passionate repentance. Millicent could never move her like that; she never came with a wet, red face and hot eyes crying to be forgiven. Milly was a good little thing. Except for a quarrel now and then with Derry when he took her toys, or interfered with a game she was playing, Milly was never naughty. But when she was naughty she was never sorry. "It's Derry's fault; he made me," she would say.

IX

Two years passed. It was the autumn of eighteen ninety-six.

Millicent was nine and Derek was seven, old enough, Matty said, to understand, when Uncle Charles came upon them. Matty couldn't say absolutely that she didn't know that John's brother Charles existed, but the bare fact of his existence was about all she did know of him. He had not turned up at her wedding, and John had never said anything about him beyond the bald statement that he had a brother in Liverpool whom he hardly ever saw. And here was Charles writing to ask if he might come to see them.

John was thoughtful for some minutes after he had read the letter; he kept turning it in his hand and frowning at it as if he didn't like it.

"Well," said Matty, "he must come, mustn't he?"

"I suppose he must."

"It'll be very nice to have him, won't it? I hardly realise that you've got a brother."

"No. I'm not at all sure that I wanted you to realise it."

"Why ever not?"

"Because you never know what he'll be up to. He's generally up to something when he wants to come."

"Well, he hasn't wanted to for a long time. You can't say the poor thing's troubled us much."

"No. No. It's about time he turned up. I've had a sort of feeling lately that he was due."

"I believe," said Matty, "you don't want him to come."

"Well, to tell you the truth, Matty, I don't. I wouldn't mind if I were by myself, but I hate it for you and the children."

"Why, what's wrong with him? Why should we mind?"

"Because you never can tell whether he'll turn up drunk or sober. And he's pretty awful when he's drunk."

"Oh, John, I'm so sorry. Is he—is he a dreadful worry to you?"

"I haven't bothered about him lately. Not since he left off writing. He always writes when he's hard up."

"And you help him?"

"Well, I had to. You see, he's got a wife and children."

"How many children?"

"Three: two girls and a boy."

"Oh, the poor things."

"That's one of the reasons why we haven't been able to do things. To go abroad."

"You poor darling—to think of your having all this on your shoulders. Why didn't you tell me?"

"What was the good? I didn't want to worry you."

"But I might have been more careful if I'd known. I wouldn't have gone and got that new frock."

"Oh, that made no difference. Besides, I haven't

done anything for a year. What bothers me is that he's staying with my poor old father. He writes from Wantage. I expect he's been trying to raise the wind there. I don't suppose father will do anything more for him. He can't afford it. He's paid his debts twice."

"So he comes to you."

"It looks like it. But I won't prejudge him. He may have changed. It may be pure brotherly affection for all I know. We must wait and see."

Two days later Charles Crawford arrived at the Rectory. John had said you never could tell whether he'd turn up drunk or sober; as it happened, he turned up in a state that was neither one nor the other; only if you knew him very well could you have judged that he was not entirely sober, so supernaturally urbane he was, so dignified in all his movements. It was the dignity, John explained to Matty afterwards, that gave him away. He moved with that superb calm because he dared not move otherwise.

Uncle Charles was fifty. He had John's irregular nose and thin, wide mouth, but his eyes were lighter, and he was bald, and his face and head were coloured all over a deep pinkish brick. A little fluffy fringe of grey hair stood on end all round his head, shutting in his baldness like a fence. It gave him a queer look of innocence out of keeping with the battered and sodden hardness of his face.

He arrived in time for dinner.

"How's Annie?" said John, when they were seated.

"First-rate, thanks. Couldn't bring her with me. To tell you the truth I couldn't afford it."

"How did you leave Father?"

"Oh, middling. The old man's getting a bit doddery, if you ask me. And he's more pig-headed than ever."

"That isn't an adjective I should have applied to him."

"I should. You don't know him as well as I do."

"I should have said I knew him better."

"Well, you may have kept on the soft side of him. I've had to get down to the bed-rock and it's hard. Hard."

John gathered that getting down to the bed-rock of his father meant applying to him for a loan without success.

"Tell you about that afterwards," said Charles. "How many kids have you got?"

"Two."

"Ah, we've gone one better. Can't do much for them, though. My boy'll have to be content with an office, like his father. What are you doing with your boy?"

"Doing with him?" said Matty. "He's only seven."

"What are you going to do with him, then?"

"Oh, he'll go to Cheltenham," said John.

A look of quiet speculation came into Charles's eyes. Oh, no, he wasn't drunk, he knew what he was about. He knew all about John, too.

"Pretty expensive that, isn't it?"

"Yes, it means saving."

"Lucky for you you can save. Wish *I* could."

The implication was that his brother was a rich man.

Only a rich man could afford to send his son to Cheltenham.

No wine was served with dinner. Charles looked round for it and saw it not. He waited till his sister-in-law had left the room before he spoke.

"Do you think I could have a whisky and soda?"

"No, old man, I don't think you could. You're better without it."

"What do you mean, without it? You don't mean I'm drunk, do you?"

"No. Not very drunk. I'm not going to let you be."

"Well, I say, I think that's pretty stingy. Here's your brother whom you haven't seen for years—not for ten years—more than ten years, and you won't give him one small whisky and soda when he asks you for it. You've got the stuff in the house, haven't you?"

"It's no use, old man. I'm not going to give it you. You've had enough."

"Enough? I should think I was the best judge whether I've had enough or not."

"I don't agree with you."

"I suppose you've told that wife of yours I drink?"

"Supposing," said John, "we go into another room and have a smoke?"

"You can't put me off that way. Did you or did you not tell your wife I drink?"

"If you will have it, I prepared her for the worst. But I told her I didn't know. You might be changed, but I'm afraid you aren't much."

"Look here, John, this is a damned inhospitable way

to treat your brother. And you're wrong. If anybody says I'm drunk he's a damned liar."

"I don't say you're drunk. I only say you will be if you're not careful. Come into the study and have a smoke."

He saw through that. His dreadful inebriate lucidity saw through John.

"Where's your wife?"

"She won't be there."

"I see. I'm not sober enough to sit in the same room with her. What does she think I'll do? Spoil the furniture?"

"No. She's probably thinking about your immortal soul."

"Damn my immortal soul. If you'd think a bit about my mortal body it would be more worth while."

John rose. "Your mortal body's going to come and have a smoke."

They went into the study; and there, when Charles was seated in a comfortable armchair with a cigarette in his mouth it struck him that if he wished to see a favourable issue to the coming interview he had better behave decently to John.

"Well," he said, "I suppose you can't help it. A parson's bound to be a bit more strait-laced than other fellows. I know your heart's in the right place, always was."

"Thank you," said John.

"I suppose you want to know what I went down to see the old man about?"

"Not if you don't care to tell me."

"Care? I came here to tell you. Well, I went down to ask him if he could oblige me with a trifling loan—I didn't mean to touch him for more than fifty—— And he told me to go to the devil. I said I'd go to you. I'm in no end of a hole or I wouldn't think of it."

"How did you get—er—into a hole?"

"Lost my job. The most devilish luck, my dear fellow."

"Yes, but you didn't lose your job for nothing. How did you manage it?"

"I don't know how it was. I was unlucky."

"Charles, you were tight."

"Only once, on my honour. I don't know how it happened. I don't drink. Not now. But that one time I'd happened to be with some fellows and it set me off. And I turned up at the office."

"Tight."

"Noticeably tight I'm afraid. The guv'nor looked in and saw me and I got the sack. Damned shame, I call it, to fire a fellow out for one indiscretion. Didn't give me a chance. Awfully rough luck on the wife and kids, isn't it?"

"It is."

"The old man takes the line that it oughtn't to have happened."

"Well, I take that line, too."

"Yes, but *he* makes it an excuse for not helping me."

"And you don't think I will?"

"No, John. I don't think you will. I don't mean

I've any right to ask you to help *me*, but I do ask you to help Annie and the kids. You don't want them to starve, do you?"

"No, I don't want them to starve."

"I'm not asking for *more* than fifty, just enough to keep us going till I get another job."

"And if you don't?"

"I shall. I'll get it all right. Don't you worry about that. I'm an A1 accountant. There isn't a better in Liverpool; and, hang it all, I kept this last job five years."

"Yes, but you lost the job before that."

"That's not the point. I got another then, I shall get another now."

"It doesn't follow. *My* point is that it's rather endless. I can't go on keeping you supplied for ever. As it is, it will be exceedingly awkward for me to raise that fifty. I shall have to sell shares. I shouldn't mind if I thought this would end it. But——"

"It shall end it. I swear it shall. I'll keep straight after this, so help me God."

"I needn't remind you that you've said that every time."

"Yes, but it's true this time. Do you think I want to get landed this way again? With a wife and three kids to think of."

"Look here, Charles, if I do lend you this money, remember I'm doing it for them, not for you. If it was only you I'd say go and break stones on the road if you can't get a better job. I've *my* wife and children to think of."

"I swear—I wouldn't ask it for myself. It's most awfully good of you."

"I'll send the cheque to Annie the first thing to-morrow morning." He thought: "It'll take all my balance at the bank, but I can borrow, and I'll sell those shares."

"To Annie?"

"Yes. To Annie."

"I suppose you couldn't make the cheque out to me?"

"I'm sorry, old man, but I suppose I can't."

"You don't trust me?"

"It's for Annie that you want it, isn't it?"

"Yes, of course it is. But—could you let me have a pound on account? I haven't a shilling, not a shilling for baccy."

"You can have my baccy," said John.

He thought: "No, if I give him a pound he'll go straight off and drink it. He'll go out to-morrow to buy a paper and he'll come back tight. No. I must be brutal."

In the morning Charles went out and bought a paper. He had still the price of a drink or two about him. But he was careful not to come back tight, noticeably tight. No man, said Charles, need get drunk unless he liked. There was no sort of fate about it. John should see that he could go straight enough when he chose. It was jolly decent of John to lend him that fifty pounds. But why the devil he couldn't make the cheque out to him he couldn't think. Looked as if he couldn't trust him, couldn't trust his own brother.

Well, he supposed it came to the same thing. He could get it out of Annie.

Uncle Charles had been at the Rectory a week, putting them all in the wrong by continuing to be sober, showing them, John said, how unkind and unwise it was of them to judge him when on the Friday he announced his intention of going up to London to see a friend about a job he'd heard of. He proposed being away till the following Monday, and would John lend him the money for his hotel expenses and his fare, to be paid back as soon as he was on his legs again? John lent him four pounds.

"You might just as well give it to him," said Matty.

"Oh, no, if it's a gift he's got to be grateful, if it's a loan he hasn't."

The first thing Charles did with the money was to go into the village and buy a pound box of the best chocolates, large ones, for Millicent and Derek. He put them in the right-hand top drawer of his dressing-table, and showed the children where they lay among his clean collars and handkerchiefs.

They were not to eat them all, or all at once, Uncle Charles said. They were not to eat more than one at a time each, three times a day, or three at a time each, once a day; six to-day, six on Saturday, six on Sunday between them. He expected, he said, to see the rest of the pound intact on his return. The children understood that the chocolates belonged to Uncle Charles and that he meant to eat the rest of the pound himself. They each promised that they wouldn't eat more than three a day.

"On your honour?"

"On our honour."

They agreed that they would visit the dressing-table drawer together; Millicent said it wouldn't be honourable for either of them to go alone. They decided that three at a time once a day would be easier than one at a time three times. As Millicent said, they certainly didn't intend to eat more, and it was to Derek that the iniquitous idea came first.

"Supposing," he said, "we each took one more, and ate only two to-morrow. It can't make any difference."

So they each ate one more, and then just another.

"We can't eat more than one to-morrow," said Millicent.

"N-no, I suppose we can't."

That was in the middle of the morning. Last thing before bed-time Derek said, "Let's go and *look* at the chocolates."

They went and looked.

"Let's eat one each, only one," he said.

They each ate one.

"Now we can't have any to-morrow," said Millicent.

"I don't care," said Derek, "there's Sunday."

But when Saturday came he said, "Supposing we eat them to-day and don't have any on Sunday."

They went up and ate their three.

"Now," said Millicent, "we can't eat any more."

Derek looked at her with clear, untroubled eyes, eyes of perfect innocence. "Supposing," he said, "we did."

"No," said Millicent, "we promised."

"There are quantities and quantities; he'll never know."

"He will if he's counted them."

"I don't believe," Derek said, "he'd count them."

And he ate one more. Millicent didn't mean to, but before she knew where she was she had eaten one more, too.

"Oh, Derek," she said, "why did we?"

"Well, anyhow, we've done it."

"There isn't very much difference between three and four, and we'll tell him; we'll say we're sorry."

She shut the drawer.

There wasn't much difference between three and four, but there was a horrible difference between four and none. The thought of the chocolates lying there in quantities haunted them with passion. There might be, Derek said, a ginger one, and they hadn't had a ginger one. They were tortured by the thought of the ginger one they hadn't had. And, when bed-time was near, Derek came softly and whispered, "Supposing we go and see if there's a ginger one."

Softly, with a terrible, overwhelming sense of sin, they went into Uncle Charles's bedroom. It was Derek who opened the dressing-table drawer and looked and turned over the chocolates. They had begun to strike the second layer.

"I believe," he said, "that's one, there, that square one."

"Bite it and see."

"If I bite it I shall have to eat it." He bit it.

Then Millicent found a square one and ate it. There were still quantities and quantities, nearly all the second layer.

"We've broken our promise," she said.

"If we've broken it," said Derek, "it doesn't matter how many more we eat."

They ate one, two, three more and then shut the drawer with a bang and listened. Somebody was coming up the stair; it was Daddy. He put his head in at the door. "Chocolates?" he said: "Don't eat too many," and went out again.

"He didn't say, 'Don't eat more than three,'" said Millicent.

"No, but what would he say if he knew?" said Derek.

"How much more have we eaten than we ought to?"

"I don't know. I didn't count."

"Do you think Daddy knows we were only to eat three?"

"P'raps he doesn't," Derek said.

They slunk downstairs to say good night.

"I hope," said Matty, "you're not eating too many chocolates."

"Oh, no, Mummy, I don't *think* we are," said Millicent.

"Uncle Charles said you weren't to eat more than three a day. He said you promised."

"Yes, Mummy, we did."

They slunk upstairs to bed. They knew that they were wicked.

But Sunday, the last day, was the worst. The impulse that drove them to the dressing-table drawer was irresistible. Their whole being ached for chocolates. Hitherto they had kept a sort of faith with each other. Neither had visited the dressing-table drawer alone. But to-day, after they had visited it together, first Millicent, then Derek, went up alone. It was as if the last supreme act of the crime could only be consummated in secrecy. And in the evening, when they opened the drawer for the last time together, not a chocolate was left.

"Are you sure," said Derek, "there's not another layer?"

"Quite sure, I've looked. *You* finished them."

"You didn't leave many."

"I left more than I've eaten."

"Do you know, Milly, we're thieves."

"We're not, they're his chocolates and he's our uncle."

"What do you suppose he'll do?"

"I don't know. He'll tell Mummy and there'll be a punishment. An awful punishment."

"Really we ought to be sent to prison if we're thieves. Uncle Charles wouldn't send us, would he?"

"I don't think he would. After all, Daddy's his brother. But he'll get us punished."

"Whatever shall we do?"

"There's one thing. I can burst open the money-box and go into the village and buy some more and put them there. I could put them in the same box and he'd never know. I'll get up early and do it first thing

in the morning, before he comes back. Then it won't matter so much."

"And we could still eat the number we're supposed to," said Derek.

"We'd *have* to, so as he shouldn't know."

And Millicent went to bed thinking how she would get up early in the morning and break open the money-box and go into the village and buy more chocolates and put them in the drawer. They'd be there long before Uncle Charles could get back from London or Mummy think of looking in the drawer. If you put back what you'd taken you weren't a thief, even if they couldn't be the same chocolates. She supposed it would be a pound box and they were the best chocolates; she wondered whether there would be enough money; she thought there would be; the money-box hadn't been opened for some time, and if only Mummy didn't know how much there was in it they would be safe. Perhaps Mummy didn't know.

Millicent was reckoning without Derek's gift for repentance. When Matty came to tuck him up and kiss him good night she found him crying.

"What is it, my darling, tell Mother."

"Oh, Mummy, I've done such a dreadful thing. It's the worst thing you could think of, if you was to think and think."

"What, darling, what have you done?"

"I've stolen Uncle Charles's chocolates. He said we was to eat three once a day, and I—I've been and eaten them, every one."

He clung to her sobbing.

"By yourself, Derry?"

"No, not quite by myself. But I think I ate most."

"Oh, my darling, that was very wrong. . . . And Millicent, did she eat more than her three? No, don't tell me."

"I won't. It was my fault. I began it and I ate the last."

"But didn't you know that that was thieving?"

"Yes, Mummy, I'm a thief. Shall I have to go to prison?"

"No, not to prison. Perhaps Uncle Charles will forgive you, if you ask him. But you'll have to be severely punished."

"What is severely punished?"

"Well, it'll be something very hard to bear."

Matty had not yet thought of the punishment. She hadn't been prepared for the sin. She would have to ask John.

"You see, it isn't only thieving. You broke your promise. That's dishonourable."

"What's dishonourable?"

"It's—it's——" Matty couldn't think how you were to say what dishonourable was.

"It's not keeping trust, making people think you're going to do something and then not doing it. You know what it is when Mummy trusts you?"

"Yes, I know that."

"Well, nobody trusts a dishonourable person. You wouldn't like not to be trusted?"

"But you *will* trust me, Mummy? You *will* trust me? I'll never do it again, I promise."

"You must keep your promise, darling."

"I will. I will. Have you forgiven me, Mummy?"

"Yes, I've forgiven you. But you'll have to be punished all the same."

"Shall I?"

"I'm afraid so, little son."

But she kissed him good night. Long after she had gone he lay awake, sobbing and wondering what the punishment would be. And through it all went the pang of his sin. He had been a thief, a thief.

In her bed in the little back room that had once been the day nursery, Millicent lay calm and apparently unconscious of sin. She put up her arms when Matty bent over her.

"Good night, Mummy," she said.

"Millicent, did you eat up Uncle Charles's chocolates?"

"I, Mummy?" She didn't mean to tell a lie, she was only trying to gain time.

"Yes, you. Derry has confessed."

"Oh-h! Did he *say* I ate them?"

"He said it was his fault."

"So it was his fault. He began it. *He* said we'd do it first. *I'd* never have thought of it."

"But you did it, too? You, a big girl. How could you, Milly?"

"Well, when you once begin eating chocolates you've *got* to go on."

"You haven't. You can stop when you choose. I didn't know you were a little greedy girl. And Milly, you stole those chocolates."

"I didn't. I was going to get some more and put them back. If you put back things that's not stealing."

"I daresay you didn't mean to steal them. But you broke your promise. That's very wicked."

"It isn't. Uncles Charles shouldn't have made me promise."

And Milly began to cry, not because she had been naughty, but because she couldn't bear to think she wasn't good. And she didn't say she was sorry or ask her mother to forgive her.

"You must ask God to forgive you," said Matty.

"God *has* forgiven me," said Milly. "he's not mean enough not to."

"You must ask him all the same. And you'll have to be punished to-morrow."

"That isn't fair when I was going to put them back. Will Derry be punished?"

"Yes, I'm afraid he will."

After her mother had left her Milly went on crying, but more in anger than in sorrow. She was very angry with Derek for confessing. Nobody need have known a thing if he hadn't told Mummy. It was too silly and stupid of him to have told, as if a little more naughtiness mattered to him when he was always naughty, while she was always good. It was good of her to think of putting back the chocolates; but, she said to herself, "If I'm to be punished for eating them I shan't put them back. That's only fair."

And in the morning Derek was whipped and Millicent was sent to bed. And when Mrs. Fielding wrote and

invited them to spend the afternoon with Eliot and Jerry they were not allowed to go.

And, after all, when Uncle Charles came back from London, and they had to confess to him, he only laughed in their faces.

"Why, you little duffers, I never thought you wouldn't eat 'em. You should have come to me instead of going blubbing to your mother. I wouldn't have told of you."

And, to Matty and John, he said, "If they hadn't blubbed you'd never have thought there was any sin in it. Two kids gobbling up a pound of chocolates. I'd have done it myself if I'd been them."

"Yes, Charles, I'm sure you would," said Matty. "Then why did you put temptation in their way?"

"I wanted to see what the little beggars would do, that's why."

Uncle Charles stayed another week and on into the next and the next, until Matty began to wonder if he would ever go. Nothing had come of his journey to London, and they began to suspect that the whole thing had been planned by Charles as a flight from the restraints of the Rectory; his face on his return looked more than ever battered and debauched.

He spent his time sitting hunched up over the fire in John's study, smoking John's tobacco. Three or four times a day he got up and went out, as he said, to stretch his legs. He stretched them in the direction of the Unicorn at the top of the hill, and when he came

back there was always a smell of whisky about his mouth.

"How long do you think he'll stay, darling?" said Matty.

"I don't know," said John. "I can't turn him out as long as he behaves himself, poor old thing. He isn't doing any harm, so far."

So far Charles had kept sober, or if not precisely sober, not what he called "noticeably tight," not drunk in that grand style and with that abandonment that John had looked for. It was as if he spared Matty and the children, or as if he offered his moderate sobriety as security for his loan.

Annie in Liverpool wrote in abject gratitude acknowledging the receipt of the cheque. She hoped John would keep Charles as long as possible. "The change is doing him so much good, and I feel he is safe with you. If only he could find something to do."

"Well, he isn't likely to find anything to do here," said John. "But no doubt poor Annie gets on better without him."

It was evident that Charles was putting off as long as he could the day when he would have to get up and look for a job.

"I think," said John, "he's a bit afraid of himself. He's trying to get sober first. As long as he can manage it better here we ought to keep him."

"Yes, I suppose we ought," said Matty.

He didn't give much trouble. He was content to sit smoking over the study fire while John and Matty

went their rounds in the parish, and when people called he refused to show himself. "They haven't come to see me," he would say.

Then one day he went up to the Unicorn towards noon and didn't come back for lunch.

"Wherever do you think he is?" said Matty.

"I think," said Derek, "he's gone for a walk."

"Did you see him go?"

"Yes, me and Milly saw him."

"Did he go up the hill or down it?"

"Up, towards the village."

"There isn't anything he can do in the village," said Matty, "is there?"

John did not answer.

By three o'clock he had not come back.

It was the day of the district visitors' tea-party. John and Matty were visiting in the Backs that afternoon. Returning to the Rectory at four o'clock they were met by Derry and Milly running down the garden path.

"Oh, Daddy, come, come quick. Uncle Charles is lying on the floor and he won't get up."

"I think he's dead," said Derry.

"Where is he?" said John.

"He's in his bedroom, all tumbled over by the fireplace. We found him there," said Milly.

The children were frightened and at the same time excited at having found Uncle Charles.

John and Matty ran upstairs to the bedroom. He went in first, looked at his brother, and came out again in a great hurry.

"Go away, children. Matty, you'd better not go in."

But Matty had gone in.

Charles was lying in a heap on the floor before the fireplace with one leg doubled under him. His face was deeply flushed, and he was very still, fixed in the attitude in which he had fallen.

"John," said she, "he *is* dead."

John scowled. "Dead-drunk," he said.

"Oh, John——"

"You'd better go."

"Can't I help you?"

"No. Keep the children away."

"Go away, dears. John, the district visitors are all there in the dining-room. Do you think they heard him fall?"

"Very likely," said John, with a grim smile.

"Has he—has he hurt himself?"

"Not he. I do wish you'd go away. I've got to get him to bed."

"But you can't lift him all by yourself."

"I can. My dear girl, do go away."

The figure on the floor stirred ominously.

"Go away quick."

John fairly shouted at her, and Matty went.

It was horrible; but nobody but John knew how horrible it was as he washed his hands in the bath-room with Matty's scented soap.

By hauling, propping and pushing he had got the obscene thing on to the bed. He left it there.

When he had washed, and changed his clothes, he went down into the dining-room.

Matty had been explaining to the district visitors. They were all sitting together round the dining-room table, Mrs. Ransome, Mrs. Caldecott, Miss Iles, Miss Begbie, and Miss Minchin; the tea things and the cake had been brought in. They waited. Wondered and waited.

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting," Matty said, trying to look as if nothing had happened. "But my husband's brother has been taken ill."

"Was it a fit?" said Mrs. Ransome.

(Then they *had* heard him fall.)

"No. It wasn't a fit."

"I saw him coming up the garden walk," said Miss Minchin.

"Oh," thought Matty, "how *did* he come? Was he reeling terribly, and did Miss Minchin see him reel?" If she did, it would be all over the village by to-morrow morning.

And she saw Mrs. Ransome look at the landlady of the White Hart, and the landlady of the White Hart look at Mrs. Ransome. They knew. Perhaps Charles had been to the White Hart. Perhaps Mrs. Caldecott had served him.

"Well, poor gentleman," said Mrs. Caldecott, "I do hope he'll get better soon."

"I think he will," said Matty. She could hear overhead the sounds made by John getting Charles into bed. Once he let him go and Charles slipped with a loud thud on to the floor. All the district visitors looked at their plates. Never in all her safe, happy life had Matty passed so agonising a moment. She couldn't bear to

think of John upstairs struggling with the great heavy beast, trying to lift him. She thought: "If only I'd stayed and taken his feet while John took his head."

Presently John came down again, looking cool and clean and tidy, really as if nothing had happened.

"Oh, Mr. Crawford," said Miss Minchin, "I'm so sorry to hear about your brother."

"It's nothing," said John. "He'll be all right to-morrow." But he knew they knew.

Charles stayed another week. He wasn't fit to travel, fit only to stretch his legs and crawl to the top of the hill where the Unicorn hung out its sign.

And John had to go round to all the inns in Wyck, to the Unicorn, the White Hart, the Red Lion, the Queen's Head, the King's Head, the Talbot Arms, the Bell, and the Three Magpies, and tell the landlords not to serve his brother with any drink. Charles had a secret store, which he kept in the drawer where the chocolates had been, hidden under a pile of handkerchiefs. John found it there and took it away.

And Charles, unable to obtain a drink either at the Rectory or any inn in Wyck, declared that he couldn't stand it any longer. He had never been so insulted in his life. Some people mightn't be able to drink a harmless whisky and soda without getting drunk; John had no business to assume that he couldn't. He would go to-morrow.

And he went, having first borrowed from John the money for his fare.

X

Miss Minchin *had* seen the rector's brother reeling up the garden walk, she had heard his feet stumbling as he struggled with the stairs, she had heard the creaking of the banisters and the two thuds on the floor overhead, and she had no doubt as to what was the matter with Mr. Charles.

And the next day Miss Minchin called on Mrs. Waddington at Lower Wyck Manor and asked her if she had met Mr. Charles Crawford who was staying at the Rectory.

Mrs. Waddington had not met him, but she understood that the rector had a brother staying with him.

"And is he at all like our dear rector?"

"No, indeed. Very far from it. I'm afraid he's a great anxiety and trouble to him."

"In what way?"

Miss Minchin lowered her voice.

"Well, I'm afraid, Mrs. Waddington, he takes too much."

"Takes too much? You don't mean he drinks?"

"It's very shocking, but that is what he does."

"But surely the rector could prevent that. He needn't give him anything."

"It's not at the Rectory he gets it. I believe he goes round to the public-houses."

"How very disgraceful. But do you positively know, Miss Minchin, that this is true."

"He was *seen* yesterday at the district visitor's party. I saw him myself through the window coming up the garden. He couldn't walk straight. Then we heard noises overhead. He fell on the floor. The poor little children found him. You could hear them screaming to the rector to come. Terrified, they were. Then the rector and Mrs. Crawford went upstairs, and presently she came down, looking very queer, and said Mr. Crawford's brother was taken ill. But we knew what his illness was. Very unpleasant for them, happening on the district visitors' day."

"Very. He couldn't have chosen a worse day."

"No. We none of us knew where to look when the rector came in. I will say he carried it off very well. But what he must have been *feeling*, Mrs. Waddington——"

"It must have been very disagreeable for Mrs. Crawford, too."

"Yes, but I do not think Mrs. Crawford would feel it half so much."

"She'd feel it if she knew how we were talking about it. I hope, Miss Minchin, you won't let this go any further. The rector's friends must all wish to spare him."

"I am the rector's friend. I certainly shall not say anything he wouldn't like said. I'm afraid it will be a dreadful worry to him. I wish he had someone with him who could see him through this trouble. Someone who could really help."

"He has his wife."

"Yes, but do you think Mrs. Crawford would be any good to him at a time like this? I don't believe there's very much in her."

"I think," said Mrs. Waddington, "there's all he wants." She had no patience with Miss Minchin when she talked about the rector, as if she ought to have been his wife. "You forget that they are devoted to each other."

"The rector would be devoted no matter what sort of woman he married. He married for better, for worse, and he's bound to stand by his wife, however unsuited to him she may be."

"I should think he *would* stand by her. As for being unsuited, is there anybody in this parish he'd have done better to marry?"

"I don't say that."

"I should think not; Mrs. Crawford is a dear little woman, and I'm fond of her."

"We all know those dear little women."

"Dear little women who love their husbands and make them happy all their lives. There aren't many like her."

"And who wouldn't want to make the rector happy? He's so good and patient and so easy to please."

"You think he's easily pleased with Mrs. Crawford, do you? I tell you they're devoted, very exceptionally devoted. Why, he's as much in love with her now after eleven years of marriage as he was on his wedding-day. Even in clergyman's families you won't find many marriages like that."

"I know. I've seen them together."

"And the poor people adore her."

"She is very good to the poor."

"Well, then, what more do you want? Can Mrs. Crawford do much more than make herself loved? And do you think an old maid is ever a good judge of a married woman?"

"I'm saying nothing against Mrs. Crawford. She can be very charming."

"Can be? She always is. She's been charming to you, though you don't like her. I'm sure I can't think why?"

"There is no why. If I say she's charming, isn't that enough?"

"It's better than what you have said. . . . And my dear Miss Minchin, for the rector's sake—you like the rector if you don't like his wife—you're going to forget this sad story you've told me?"

"Indeed I am. It won't go any further."

But it went as far as Mrs. Robert Fielding, whom Miss Minchin met going into the Market Square, and a little way further to Miss Norton at the school, and when Mrs. Waddington met Mrs. Hawtrey of Medlicott it went further still, and though Mrs. Waddington had begged that it might stop there, when Mrs. Hawtrey met Mrs. Markham of Wyck Wold it went to her, and from her it spread to all the parsonages in the neighbourhood, and Edward and Alice Farrar came from Upper Speed to condole with John and Matty and find out more about it; so that in no time all the parish and the county knew that the rector had

a brother who drank—oh, disgracefully—in public-houses.

And Miss Minchin, on her way from Miss Norton's school, turned in at the White Hart to see whether Mrs. Caldecott could be made to say anything. Miss Minchin burned to know whether Mr. Charles had been seen in the bar of the White Hart, and whether Mrs. Caldecott had served him.

"You know, Mrs. Caldecott, that the rector's brother drinks?"

"So they say, but I don't listen to half what they say."

"Well, but you must have seen for yourself the other day."

"If I saw anything or heard anything I shall hold my tongue about it, and I should advise you, Miss Minchin, to do the same."

"Has he been at the White Hart?"

Mrs. Caldecott laughed. "I'm sure I don't know, and if I did I wouldn't tell you. I won't have it said that I tell tales all over the parish. If you're so fond of the rector you'd better not know anything if you're asked."

"I? I won't say a word. I knew you knew as much as I do."

"Yes and no more," said Mrs. Caldecott as she opened the passage door to let Miss Minchin out.

She looked in at the bar where Mr. Caldecott in his shirt-sleeves was all alone, polishing up pewter. To him Mrs. Caldecott related her encounter with Miss Minchin.

"Nasty cat. She'll spread that tale up and down the parish, you'll see. And it's all spite because the rector didn't marry her."

"You didn't say anything about the rector coming round and telling us not to serve him, did you?"

"Not me. And if all the other landlords will hold their tongues——"

"Well, I bet they haven't got the start of Miss Minchin."

And Grace Minchin went her rounds, visiting the poor and sick people, bringing them soup and packets of tea and tobacco, little gifts that made her acceptable; she turned in at the Girls' Club, and took her evening class and her Sunday school; she went with a meek and holy expression on her face, slightly exalted, doing the rector's business, feeling herself gentle and kind, with a heart full of love for the sick and poor people.

Going out of one of the cottages in Sheep Street (where old Mrs. Hinton lived who had the bad leg) Grace met the rector.

"Well, Grace, still busy about some kindness?"

"Oh, I don't do much."

"You do a very great deal. I don't know what the village would do without you."

"It has always been a pleasure for me to help you. You do know that."

"Yes, I know it."

He was still sorry for her because she loved him.

And as she looked at his kind, worried face Miss Minchin was troubled because she had spread that tale

about his brother. And suddenly she remembered how she had once brought a still more scandalous tale to the rector and he had reproached her. She could see herself standing up before him in the study; she could see his stern, indignant face, and hear his voice, coldly rebuking. She could see herself crying, and she felt again the deadly pang that had seized her at the time.

"Do you know," she said, "I've never forgotten something you once said to me."

"I?"

"Yes, you. I'd come to you with some silly scandal, something I supposed you ought to know so that you could stop it going round, and you told me I could stop it myself by not listening. I oughtn't to have told you that story. I've often thought of it, and been sorry, and wanted to tell you I was sorry."

"I haven't remembered it against you. I remember nothing but your goodness and kindness."

"I've remembered it against myself."

"It's a long time ago. You were young then."

"I was old enough to know."

She felt that by confessing to a sin done years ago she was absolved from the sin done yesterday.

"It was very wrong of me."

"I was sure your kind heart would show you that, Grace. I've no doubt *I* was very rude and bad tempered about it."

"You weren't. You were goodness itself. You always are."

"No. No. My impatience and my bad temper keep me very far from goodness. . . . But backbiting, Grace,

is terrible. It's a sort of murder. It's hitting something helpless that can't defend itself. It's a sin of cruelty. You see, my soul has a decent life in other people's minds so long as nobody knows my failing; if you tell my failing you kill that life of my soul and I can never get it again. What we need is a feeling of the sacredness of people. Just people. The tramp on the road has a sacred inviolable life. His failing is his own secret."

"Is it, if he lets it be seen?"

"Yes, as far as I'm concerned. I've no business with it. At least I might say 'I met a tramp going along the road very drunk,' because nobody knows who the tramp is. But I should think twice before I said 'I met Bill Jakes very drunk going down Sheep Street.' Because everybody knows Bill Jakes."

"Everybody knows he drinks. "

"Then I admit he's so dead that I can't kill him. The unforgivable sin is telling somebody who doesn't know."

She had sinned the unforgivable sin. Did he know? Was he gently, subtly, rebuking her? She turned him from the trail by sending him back to the past.

"That's what I did—that time," she said.

"Oh, well, if you only told me. Perhaps the rector doesn't count. You knew I was a cul-de-sac."

No, he didn't know. He believed in her. He remembered nothing but her goodness and kindness. And she was ashamed; she saw herself as he saw all those who did what she had done, sinners of the unforgivable sin.

"Mr. Crawford, what is the sin against the Holy Ghost, then?"

"The sin against the Holy Ghost? Killing another person's soul. Enslaving their soul with ours. Denying their spiritual freedom."

"Not slander?"

"No. Not slander. Tyranny."

Then she was safe.

He meditated.

"To be always kind, Grace, always kind. If one only could be——"

"I should have thought no one was kinder than you."

"You don't know me. Not bad temper only, but pride and vanity, and lots of little meannesses that only myself knows."

"Do any of us know ourselves?"

"We should try to. It's the first step to knowing God."

He had never said so much, never gone so far in intimacy. Something secret and sacred passed between them, and Grace suffered a conversion.

They were walking on together up the village street towards the Unicorn and Lower Speed Hill, and it was there that the light came to her. She was not aware of it all at once.

"I hope your brother is better," she said.

It was the Unicorn that made her think of him.

"Yes, he is in Liverpool now. He left us yesterday."

"You must miss him."

Better to talk of him as if he could be missed.

"Ye—yes, Charles has a kind heart; sort of fellow who'd spend his last shilling on chocolates for the children."

They parted at the top of the hill.

"Come and see Matty soon," he said.

"I'll come."

He thought—the Unicorn made him think of it—"She knows, but I can trust her not to tell. It was pretty of her to ask me if I missed him."

And she thought: "How good he is. If only I could be like him. How could I tell that tale? How could I? Spreading his shame abroad." A sudden wounding repentance seized her and many memories of his and Matty's kindness—Matty's kindness which had forgiven her so much. He had said, "Your kind heart would show you." Kind? Kind? Her heart was not kind. Her heart turned in disgust against itself, and she vowed then and there that never again, so long as she lived, would she say an uncharitable word about anybody. And she would try to love Matty. She went into her house and knelt down by her bed, the bed where she had once lain, night after night, sleepless with passion and jealousy, and prayed that she might love Matty.

Thus the moment that John had foretold came at last to Grace, and, out of her brief communion with his goodness, the divine thing descended on her.

John was sincere when he talked about "pride and vanity and little meannesses that only myself knows." It had struck him that it was easy enough to accuse

oneself of impatience and bad temper, nobody minded owning up to a bad temper; but meanness, now, who would willingly confess to meanness? Yet, to be honest with himself, what was it but meanness, that reluctance that he felt in parting with the fifty pounds to Annie? It was almost as if he had grudged it to Annie. No matter if it was difficult to raise so large a sum, no matter if he couldn't really afford to give it, if given at all, it should have been given with a cheerful spirit.

He had not been a cheerful giver; he had been a giver dejected and afraid, asking himself whether he could afford it. Thinking of himself, instead of thinking only of poor Annie.

And he was proud and vain. It was all very well for him to keep his body in temperance, soberness and chastity, seeing that sheer pride would have prevented him from keeping it otherwise. As for vanity, didn't he like Miss Minchin to think well of him? Didn't he like everybody to think well of him? And yet deep down in his heart he didn't care what anybody thought, and that was pride. He could have fought the whole world for what he believed, not caring, and there would be pride in that. Deep down in his heart he cared only for Matty, and for Derek and Millicent a little way after Matty. But didn't he fairly wallow in the bliss of Matty's adoration? And wasn't it all very bad for him? Oh, if he could only be single-minded and walk humbly before God.

It was his condemnation of his brother that made him look into his own heart to see if there were no sins there

that he could set against poor Charles's drunkenness. When John passed a hunchback or a lame man on the road he would try and slink by unnoticed; he so hated to show himself to his inferior brother upright and well formed. Even so, his own integrity weighed heavy on him when contrasted with Charles's degradation.

So John searched his heart.

That evening he and Matty sat together talking of Charles.

"If it had been anything but drink," said Matty.

"And yet," said John, "there are worse things than drunkenness, worse things than any sins of the poor flesh. Dreadful sins of the spirit."

"They are not so disgusting," Matty said. "When I think what you had to do for him."

"Don't think, forget it. It's for you I mind, that you should have been subjected——"

"I wasn't subjected. *I* didn't put him to bed."

"You saw him. Matty, I'd no business to let you in for him."

"Darling, it wasn't your fault."

"Yes, I oughtn't to have let him come."

"You couldn't turn your own brother from the door."

"I could, and I would if I had known."

"You didn't know. For all you knew he might have been different."

"I knew he wouldn't be. Matty, this is the sort of thing that makes me despair. All one's hopes, all one's faith, all one's prayers, gone for nothing. Charles will

simply go on from bad to worse. And I can't stop him. Nothing can stop him."

"Perhaps in the next world he'll stop. He'll be given a chance."

"Perhaps. But in this world he's done for. And think of my poor old father. If I had a son like that, Matty, it would break my heart."

"It would mine. Darling Derry. Those chocolates. You don't think, John, that he'll grow up terribly uncontrolled?"

John sighed. "We must see that he doesn't. He'll need very careful guidance. But there's one thing about Derry. You can always appeal to his affection. He's always sorry."

"Yes. I thought his little heart would break that night. Milly isn't sorry. But then, Milly's hardly ever naughty."

"No, she's a good little thing."

"Miss Norton says she's the best little girl in the school."

Derek and Millicent were going to the little school in the Market Square now. And always Millicent's reports were good, and Derek's were unsatisfactory. Derek showed an indomitable disinclination to learn.

"And she'll grow up good," said Matty. "I do hope she won't marry too young, so that we can have her with us."

"If there are no more young men about in ten years' time than there are now, you needn't worry."

"It's selfish of me," said Matty, "but I do want to

keep her. I shan't be able to bear it when she goes to Cheltenham."

"Well, that time hasn't come yet. I only hope I shall be able to afford to send her there."

"Oh, John, you don't think you won't be?"

"I don't know, Matty. It depends on Charles. Annie may want a lot of help."

"What should you do then?"

"I should teach her myself. But I hope it won't come to that. Cheltenham's the place for Milly."

So they talked, so they planned and looked forward and hoped and feared and comforted each other. Charles had brought the first awful element of uncertainty into their life. "If it wasn't for Charles," Matty said, "we should be too happy."

And, after all, Millicent went to Cheltenham; for that winter John's father died and left him two hundred a year. The rest of the old man's money went in legacies to two old aunts and in fifty pounds a year to Charles, paid every six months, just enough to keep him from starvation.

No sooner had Charles touched the first instalment of twenty-five pounds than he booked his passage to New York, leaving Annie and the children behind. He promised to send money home when he should have found a job in the United States. But no money came and no news of Charles. John said that looked as if Charles had found a job, otherwise he would have written for more money. Meanwhile, out of his increased income, he had to allow Annie a hundred and

fifty a year, which left him a little better off than he had been before.

"*Must* you do it?" said Matty, thinking of her children.

"I must. I can't let poor Annie starve. It's little enough. She'll have to take a paying guest."

And Annie in Liverpool took a paying guest. Her boy went into an office, her elder girl did typing for a firm of shipowners, and the younger one helped her mother at home. And while Annie and her little family lived in comfort, and Millicent went to Cheltenham, John sold his pony and governess-cart, and walked (he said walking was good for him); he gave up his subscriptions to the *Spectator* and *Punch;* his clothes got shabbier and shabbier, and meals at the Rectory got plainer and plainer, and Matty patched and darned and made her own dresses. She loved that old greenish black coat of John's that she was never tired of mending, and the high waistcoat and the little round hat.

And the rector added to his work yet another burden. He couldn't afford a tutor or even a governess for Derek, so he taught him himself till the little troublesome boy was ready for his preparatory school.

Nobody but John knew what it cost him, the long hours, the continued effort to keep his temper, to be always patient, always kind, while Derek stumbled through his Latin and Greek, worried his history into a tangle, and made every possible blunder in his Euclid and arithmetic. It wasn't that the boy was stupid—"No boy," said John, "had better brains if only he would use them"—but he was incorrigibly lazy and

careless, and he hated learning. The wonder of Derek would have become a vanished dream but that John persuaded himself that it was all his fault; he was not a good teacher, he didn't really know how to bring out what was in the boy. Wait till he went to Cheltenham, then, John said, "we shall see a very different Derek." His great fear was lest Derek might come to dislike him out of sheer boredom, but Derek graciously consented to overlook the unpleasantness of his father's efforts. At the close of one awful morning he said sweetly, "I forgive you, Daddy, for trying to teach me."

And the dream of Rome faded; it was too far off to be worth talking about. Yet, perhaps, they said, when all this business of education was ended, they might go.

XI

SEVEN years passed, each year like the other, each with its long procession of Sundays, its great spaces between Easter and Harvest, Harvest and Christmas. Every day Matty and John visited some cottage or farm, went to some tea-party or gave one, meeting the same people over and over again; they knew at what moment the familiar phrases would be uttered, they foresaw the familiar gesture; they knew that all their days would be like this, and that no interruption and no deliverance would ever come. They were so bored at times that they could hardly bear it, and Rome seemed farther off than ever.

And they were happy, happy in the anticipation of each other, happy in their tranquil, continual communion, happy when their tired eyes looked at each other; above all, happy when the day was done and they sat together in the small room filled with well-known, beloved objects: the copper lustre jugs with blue bands and raised flowers on the bands that Farmer Burton had given to Matty; the red and white china dogs that Mrs. Caldecott had given; the Lowestoft bowl that Mr. Horner, the butcher, had won in a raffle and presented to the rector. The lamp would be lit and one would read while the other listened, or they would talk about their children. John's hair was growing grey at fifty-three, and his face was scored with little creases; and

Matty at forty-three had delicate lines about her forehead and her eyes, and a fine powder of silver in her dark hair; but to John no woman's face was so beautiful as Matty's, and to Matty no man's face so beautiful as John's.

And the children came and went between home and school, their coming and going were the only changes their parents knew.

It was the midsummer holidays, August, nineteen three. Millicent and Derek were home from Cheltenham.

Millicent at sixteen was square and sturdy, square in her body, square in her forehead and her chin, the tip of her nose was a soft-rounded square. She had a wide, good mouth, and slow, quiet brown eyes. She wore her brown hair parted in the middle, brushed in two wings off her temples and tied behind with a black ribbon.

Her mother said of her, "Milly is so good, so good." Not a trace of the greedy little girl who had stolen Uncle Charles's chocolates. So good that all through the holidays she went about the house doing odd jobs, making the beds, arranging the flowers, helping Matty to patch and darn, and working in the garden with her father. So good that she was for ever looking after the old and the sick people in the village, taking round soup and tea and little petticoats and vests from the pile of baby's clothes that Matty kept ready in the linen cupboard. Milly's special pride and care were the children and the maternity cases. It was Milly who tried to cure the Mabbitt baby of its croup, sitting under a blanket tent with the child on her knee and holding its

mouth over a jug of steaming hops. They were waiting for the doctor, while the baby struggled, drawing ropey, strangling breaths. Dr. Ransome couldn't come, but he sent a bottle of medicine. His partner, Dr. Slade, couldn't come, but *he* sent a bottle of medicine, too, and the medicines didn't look or smell the same, so that neither Mrs. Mabbitt nor her mother, Mrs. Trinder, knew which was the right one. The two bottles stood cork-full on the chimney-piece. Milly saw them there.

"Aren't you going to give him his medicine?" she said.

"I dunnow wich to give 'en."

"Give 'en Dr. Ransome's meddycine," said old Mrs. Trinder. "I 'olds by Dr. Ransome."

"And I 'olds by Dr. Slade. If I give 'en any I shall give 'en 'is."

The old woman took down the bottles and drew out the corks.

"There's good in all meddycines," she said. "Mix 'en."

It was Milly in her wisdom who stopped that.

"No," she said firmly, "you mustn't. They're different medicines and they won't go together. You might poison the child."

She looked up out of the tent, her good, square face calm and competent. "Give him Dr. Ransome's medicine."

Unwilling and unconvinced, Mrs. Mabbitt poured out the dose and gave it to the baby. Milly closed the blanket tent again and the baby lay quietly in her arms; it began to breathe more freely in the steaming air inside the tent. All was going well when a dreadful

thing happened. There was a long, ropey rattle in the baby's throat as the croup loosened, and a cry went up from Mrs. Mabbitt and Mrs. Trinder.

"She's smootherin' the chile. She's smootherin' the chile."

And the two women tore down Milly's blanket tent, upsetting the jug with the violence of their movement. The good hop-tea streamed along the floor, and the baby, scalded by the splash, screamed loudly, and was snatched from Milly's lap by its frantic mother.

"I'll not 'ave my chile murthered," she screamed. "You, Miss, you know no more of chillern than the cat."

"The child was going on beautifully till you rushed in and spoiled everything. You can look after him yourself. I won't have anything to do with it."

"And I will look after 'en."

And Mrs. Trinder echoed, "She'll look after 'en. You needn't coom 'ere no more, Missy."

Milly, indignant and disgusted, went back to the Rectory.

"What is the good, Daddy, of trying to help people when they're so stupid?"

"They can't help being stupid, Milly. You'll have to learn to bear with stupidity."

"I can't bear with it. They'll kill that child between them. He was getting better every minute with the hop-tea and the blanket tent. Everything I did was right."

"How did you know about the hop-tea and the tent?" said Matty.

"I looked up croup in the Family Medicine Book. If

the baby dies it'll be Mrs. Mabbitt's fault and that old woman's. They'd rather it dies their way than be cured my way."

The baby didn't die. Miraculously, it recovered.

And Milly continued to visit the sick poor, telling them what to do and what not to do; how they were to keep their windows open at night, and make soup out of vegetables if they hadn't got meat, and to ask for unpolished rice at the grocer's because it was more nourishing. And the sick poor took Milly's soup and puddings and packets of tea and laughed at her behind her back, the little lady who thought she knew everything. They didn't love her as they loved John and Matty. They felt that, with all her goodness, she didn't love them.

Then, in the Christmas holidays, Milly did a thing that shocked everybody who heard of it. She went to see Mrs. Herbert in the brothel at the Backs; Milly who was not allowed to go into the Backs at all.

Mrs. Herbert didn't live in the Backs, but she had been born there, one of a family of young prostitutes following their mother's trade. Mrs. Herbert unwillingly. Poor Sally had tried hard to keep herself to herself, refusing to obey her parent, and when she was still young, not more than Milly's age, Bill Herbert came courting her. He explained himself to Matty. "I never saw no 'arm in the poor maid. Sally be a good maid. A good maid she be. And I zez, I'll take 'er outer that bad 'ouse before she cooms to no 'arm. 'Er's promised me 'er'll never zet foot in it again."

But Sally had to send to the Rectory for the maternity bag a month before Bill married her.

"I never meant to 'arm the poor maid," he said. "I loved 'er true."

And they were happy. Sally was not a pretty girl; she was sallow and very thin; her dry, colourless hair was dragged close along the top of her head, and her skin was stretched so tight over her bones that she looked like a skeleton. But Bill loved her. And when the baby came he loved her all the more, for the baby had nearly killed Sally; he was a big, strong baby, heavy to lift and hard to hold. Sally lay in bed for a month, and got up looking more like a skeleton than ever. She sat listless by the fire, nursing the baby, and could hardly drag herself about to do the housework. Bill did what he could to help her, and when winter came he had nothing else to do. Bill was a farm labourer, and that year things went badly with the farmers; Farmer Burton was turning his men off one after the other and Bill was the first to go.

Then Sally began to waste rapidly; the baby, fed on milk from the Rectory, grew fatter and fatter, and his mother, for all the soup and the good meat they gave her, grew thinner and thinner; there were deep holes under her cheek bones, her skin stretched tighter and tighter, and the likeness to the skeleton was complete. She had tried to sit up and go about as long as she could, then suddenly after Christmas she took to her bed. The fat, pink baby lay beside her, chuckling, while Sally sickened. He looked as if he had drained his mother's life away.

Then Bill went off to look for work. He tramped the country for miles in rain and snow, he crossed into the neighbouring counties, Oxfordshire, Worcestershire, and Warwickshire, looking for work and finding none.

And in her little room, the room she loved in the cottage on the Winchway Road, Sally was dying. Two neighbours sat up with her at night in turn when Bill was away, and throughout the day Matty and Milly and John in turn went in and out, staying an hour at a time. Milly never forgot the sight of her father propping Sally up with his left arm while his right arm held to her mouth a cup of broth; never forgot his kind voice saying, "Drink a little more, Sally, just a little more," till it was finished and Sally's head lay still on her pillow, and she smiled a pitiful, tight smile, strained back from her teeth. Some deep instinct in Milly was appeased when she made up the fire and boiled the water for Sally's tea, when she lifted Sally's weak head to drink, and sat nursing Sally's fat baby. A neighbour looked in now and then when they were gone, but for the rest of the time Sally lay alone with the baby.

That was how it happened.

One day Milly came and found Sally's bed empty, the little house empty. The neighbour told her that Sally's mother, Mrs. Jakes, had come that morning and taken her away in a cart, lying in straw.

"I must go to her," said Milly.

"I wouldn't, Miss. 'Tis a bad 'ouse, not fit for such as you."

"I must go to her," Milly said again, and went.

It was awful to think of Sally dying in the bad house.

The brothel stood at the end of the alley in the Backs, separated from the Backs Lane by a row of dingy cottages; it crouched low behind them, hiding its shame. A pool of rain water lay by the filthy doorstep and the mud was trampled round it. The dark door was smeared with dirt.

Two young prostitutes, Sally's sisters, stared out of the doorway with evil, sunken faces and sullen eyes. They slunk away out of sight when they saw Milly coming.

Milly knocked on the door that stood open. Mrs. Jakes came forward. Her face was more sunken, more sullen, more repulsive than her daughters; it frightened Milly, but she stood firm.

"Are you Mrs. Jakes'?"

"And if I be Mrs. Jakes what do you want?"

"I want to see Sally."

"Sally's dying."

"I know. She wants me."

"She did zay I wuz to let you know she wuz 'ere," Mrs. Jakes admitted. "You can come in."

Milly went into the horrible little kitchen. A fire of small coal smouldered in the black grate. Through the small square window, plastered with dirt, a grey light filtered. It fell on the rotting four-poster propped with an old packing-case against the inner wall.

Milly followed the woman up the cracked and slanting staircase that led into a garret room. The room was bare except for one crippled chair whose seat bristled with broken cane, and the thin mattress where Sally lay.

A sagging door gave on to another room. Milly saw an iron bed covered with a patchwork quilt, and on the floor a bedding of dirty sackcloth stuffed with straw. There was twilight in Sally's room, for one window-pane was broken and patched with brown paper. Then Milly saw nothing but Sally.

Mrs. Jakes drew the chair to the edge of the mattress.

"Will you zet down, Missy?"

Milly sat down, insecurely. Mrs. Jakes remained standing, looking at her daughter.

" 'Er be nought but a skeleton. A praper skeleton, 'er be."

She sighed a loud sigh, and turned and left Milly alone with the dying girl. Milly heard her snuffing noisily as she went down the stair.

The chair raised her too high above the mattress, so she knelt down on the floor. She took Sally's hand; it lay, a knotted claw, bone yellow, in Milly's soft, pink palm.

"Is it you, Miss?"

"Yes, it's me, Sally."

"It wuz good of you to coom. Can I be took back, Miss Milly? I don't want to be 'ere."

"We'll try, Sally. Father'll see what can be done."

"It 'ud break Bill's 'eart if he knew I wuz 'ere. I promised 'en I'd coom 'ere no more. Break 'is 'eart, it 'ud."

Milly slipped to the floor, crouching, still holding Sally's hand. Sally seemed to get some comfort from the warm contact, for she looked up and smiled her sad smile. Milly saw that Sally's eyes were glazed and that

a thick scum clung to her shrunken lips. She thought: "This is how people look when they're dying." And she had a little thrill, feeling good and brave for having come to the bad house and for keeping watch over dying Sally, holding that awful hand.

Half an hour passed and Milly still crouched on the floor. She was glad that the bad people kept away and that she was alone with Sally, and at the same time she was frightened at the thought of Sally's dying.

It was almost dark when she heard the stair creak, and looked round and saw her father's face coming up above the level of the landing.

"Father——"

"Is that you, Milly. My child, what are you doing here?"

"Watching Sally."

"You must go home at once. You oughtn't to have come here."

"I had to come. Sally wanted me."

"Yes, dear, but you must go now. I can't have you here."

"I can't leave Sally. She wants me. She wants me to hold her hand."

"I'll stay with her."

She whispered, "Father, she's dying."

"I know," he whispered back. "Dr. Ransome told me. I'll stay with her till she dies."

John was carrying the cup of the Last Sacrament and the bread and wine. He spread out a white damask napkin on the floor and set them on it.

"Will you hold her hand?" said Milly. "I think she's frightened."

"Yes, when I've finished, I'll hold her hand. Come, I must see you out of this."

He raised her from the floor and went before her down the dark stairs. "There," he said when they reached the outer door, "run away and don't come back again."

He asked Mrs. Jakes for a candle; she produced two guttering ends stuck in a broken saucer. John, carrying the saucer, went upstairs. He set the candle on the floor beside the cup. Its light threw strong shadows on Sally's yellow skeleton face. His own black shadow rose up above him, immense on the slope of the ceiling.

He said the prayer of Confession and the prayer of Consecration, he raised her in his arms and put the bread in her mouth and gave her the wine to drink. Steps came up the creaking stair, three evil heads appeared above the landing, the young prostitutes and their mother watched him.

He said the Lord's Prayer and the prayer for the dying. "'O Almighty God, with whom do live the spirits of just men made perfect, after they are departed from their earthly prisons; We humbly commend the soul of this thy servant, our dear sister, into thy hands, as into the hands of a faithful Creator, and most merciful Saviour; most humbly beseeching thee that it may be precious in thy sight. Wash it, we pray thee, in the blood of that immaculate Lamb that was slain to take away the sins of the world; that whatsoever defilements it may have contracted in this miserable and

naughty world, through the lusts of the flesh or the wiles of Satan, being purged and done away, it may be presented pure and without spot before thee. And teach us who survive, in this and like other daily spectacles of mortality, to see how frail and uncertain our own condition is; and so to number our days that we may seriously apply our hearts to that holy and heavenly wisdom, whilst we live here, which may in the end bring us to life everlasting through the merits of Jesus Christ thine only Son our Lord. Amen.' "

The three listeners set up a violent crying, but when John looked at them they turned and scuttled away like frightened rats into their hole below.

Sally's hand moved towards him over the counterpane. He covered it with his own. Sally's glazing eyes turned to him.

"Will 'ee tell Bill to coom and take me home? I want to die at home."

"Yes, Sally, I'll tell him."

But he knew that Sally would not die at home, she would die very soon, in her mother's brothel, in horror and abomination.

An hour passed. Sally looked up at the ceiling where the immense shadow of the rector hovered.

"Zee 'ee there," she said.

"Yes, Sally, I see. It's only my shadow."

"I zee no shadow. I zee a big light. It's rising up off of me. So beautiful."

He waited. He held her up in his arms. He waited till her head fell forward on his breast and her breath passed from her in a loud, rattling groan.

The next day John saw to it that Sally's body was removed from the house in the Backs to the little house in the Winchway Road where she had been happy. Bill found her there. Bill cried with rage and grief when he heard that Sally had died in the brothel. "'Tis there that I took her from. She weren't to go back no more. It wouldn't 'ave 'appened if I'd bin 'ere. It wouldn' 'ave 'appened if I'd bin 'ere." And he refused to look at the fat baby. "That's wot killed her," he said. "I won' look at 'en." The baby was put out to nurse with a neighbour till such time as its father's heart should turn to it again.

And in the Rectory they talked of Sally.

"Father, what was the light that Sally saw?"

"I don't know, Milly. It may have been a hallucination. It may have been—I don't know."

"I'm glad she saw it. Perhaps she thought it was God. She'd like that."

"Perhaps," said Matty, "it was God."

"Oh, no, Mother, I don't think it was."

Millicent was always sensible.

And now it was the midsummer holidays again. Millicent at seventeen was more devoted to her parish work than ever. Millicent had listened with enthusiasm to the earnest addresses of the Principal of her College, exhorting the girls to social service. She had no intention of doing what the Hawtrey girls were doing, what she called "jigging her life away." Life to Millicent was already a grave and arduous affair.

Three years at Cheltenham had given her a high idea

of herself; she felt infinitely superior to the Hawtrey girls. If she went to a dance at the Corbetts' or the Fieldings' it was in the spirit of sacrifice to a social tradition that she did not share. She went because Derek went, or because her mother told her to go. And although she always enjoyed herself she refused to admit it, which Derek said was jolly mean of her.

"You should have seen her, Mummy, tucking into the ices."

Somehow Matty could see Milly, her sturdy, serious Milly, tucking into the ices, but she could not see her dancing. Yet Milly danced. "Like an animated sack of potatoes," Derek said, but she danced, and was flushed and, in her quiet way, excited. Matty found Milly's excitement pathetic. She wondered what life would do with her, she wondered whether Milly wondered, whether she had dreams, such dreams as Matty dreamt when she waited for the shining miracle to happen. But the dancing mood soon went and Milly was busy with her parish again. She seemed to have no ideas beyond it. The Mabbits, the Trinders and the Ballingers took up more room in Milly's mind than the Fieldings, the Hawtreys and the Corbetts. And Milly hadn't any sense of the miraculous.

And Derek had no patience with Milly's parish work.

"Why will you go and sit in those stinking cottages?"

"Because I've got to."

"You're getting fat," he said.

"I'm not fat, am I, Mummy?"

"No, darling. Don't mind what Derry says."

"I don't."

"Don't you? Well, you'll be as fat as Burton's prize sow if you go on like that. Why don't you come out for a walk with me, and get it down?"

"I can't. I've got my work."

"Your *work!* You'll be another Miss Minchin if you don't look out."

"I won't. I'm not in love with Daddy."

"Hush, Milly," said her mother.

"Well, everybody knows she *is*, Mummy. She wouldn't work if it wasn't to please him. That's all she does it for."

"And what do you do it for?" said Derek.

"I do it because it's right."

"You don't. You do it to please yourself. Because you like fussing and bossing people and because it makes you feel important."

"You're not telling the truth, Derry?"

"I am. Your mind's getting as fat as your body. If you could see it, it would be a disgusting sight."

"I'm not listening to you, you lazy, impudent thing."

"Milly, Milly, don't squabble. He's only teasing you."

"Oh, you'll back him up, Mummy, whatever he says and does."

Milly had no patience with his laziness and impudence. She had no patience with her mother's adoration of him.

Derek at fifteen was tall for his age, and straight and

slender. He carried himself with an air of engaging insolence. He had a voice like an angel and sang in the Chapel choir at Cheltenham. His face was beautiful. Its nose had an impudent tilt, and its mouth, rather wide, rather full and exquisitely formed, looked, like Matty's mouth, as if it were smiling when it wasn't. His eyes were deep larkspur blue, with curling corners. And his close-cropped, sparrow-brown hair had an agreeable kink in it that wasn't quite a curl. When people praised her brother's beauty, Milly turned up her contemptuous nose and said, "He isn't beautiful. He's pretty. Boys oughtn't to be pretty. His eyes are too blue. They look like actresses' eyes."

She had no patience with his beauty.

Yet Derek wasn't lazy. Up till now, provided you didn't ask him to read any book that would improve his mind, he had always been ready to do what you wanted, to work with his father in the garden, to run errands for his mother, to play cricket and football with the village boys. Up till now Derek's days had been spent in cycling about the country, playing tennis with the Fieldings and Waddingtons, the Corbetts, Markhams and Hawtreys, and in reading detective stories and Dickens. Derek had left his preparatory school, but College as yet had made no impression on his mind; he held classics and mathematics, modern languages and history in equal disesteem. And John said, "We must see what the next term will do for him." And the next term did nothing but improve his football form. He was popular with the boys, and John, in an excess of optimism, suggested that, what with his games and his

popularity, perhaps they could make him a schoolmaster. He understood that scholarship was becoming less and less important. Derek had only two ideas on the subject of a profession: that he wouldn't be "a stinking schoolmaster," and that he barred the Church.

"That's all right," John had said, "I can't see Derry's face in the pulpit."

Time enough to think about a profession three years hence. The boy was well and happy.

Up till now. But in the midsummer term something had happened to Derek. He was dejected. He had lost his light-heartedness, his habit of gay, explosive laughter. He went off for long solitary rides on his bicycle; he shut himself up in his room, where he would lie for hours on his bed in a sullen dream; he sang no more and had no more interest in Dickens and Sherlock Holmes. Derek didn't want to be at home. He wanted to be back in his master's house at Cheltenham, hanging about the railing on the off-chance of seeing little Hetty Bennett, the master's daughter, go up the garden walk. Even Chapel had a charm for him that summer, for from his place in the chancel choir he had a perfect view of Hetty sitting in the master's seat. Hetty had grey eyes and a geranium mouth and solid masses of brown hair with gold high-lights on it. The sight of her gave him a mysterious aching pain. And yet he had no clear idea of what had happened to him. He only knew he had felt like this ever since the Saturday afternoon when he had sat beside her at the cricket match, and she had talked to him about the hockey at her school. She had said she wasn't very good at it,

and he had said, foolishly, that he believed she would be good at everything, and anyhow it didn't matter if she weren't. By which he meant that it was enough for her to be there, looking like that.

Sometimes he played tennis with her in the master's garden. She couldn't play well and she lost him every other game, but what did that matter? He lived for the moments when he picked up the balls for her, for then she looked at him with a sudden shining smile and sometimes he managed so that their hands touched. He was getting to know her quite well, when the holidays came and stopped all that, the midsummer holidays with endless weeks and weeks.

And there was Milly with her eternal parish. That summer he hated Milly because she wasn't Hetty, and because she reminded him of Hetty. Hetty was feminine and so was Milly, and this quality in Milly attracted and at the same time repelled him. She was so frightfully soft that when you squeezed her your fingers sank into her flesh, and he found this softness, that was not Hetty's softness, repulsive. He took a positive pleasure in tormenting her; he sulked and quarrelled with her; he teased and fought with her like a puppy that loses its temper in its play. The sight of Milly in her sturdy, rounded adolescence irritated him. And yet he wasn't happy when she was not there. He wanted to be with her in order to torment her.

John noticed this change in his once delightful son. He set it down to its true cause, the stress of adolescence. Derry was feeling it; this continual bickering with Milly was a symptom. He was going through a

phase. Well, they all had to go through it. But John meant that Derry shouldn't go alone. He would have a straight talk with him. The boy should learn to understand himself and be prepared. So he called him into his study.

"Derry," he said, "I want to talk to you."

"All right, Father. Fire away."

"Isn't there something you want to tell me?"

Derry thought of Hetty. He flushed violently. Not to save his life could he have talked to his father about Hetty.

So he said, "No, there isn't. What makes you think there is?"

"You, my boy."

Derry hated it when his father called him "my boy."

"Something's come over you. You're not yourself. You're restless and quarrelsome. You'd no right to speak to Milly as you spoke to her to-day."

"Oh, if that's all," said Derek, much relieved, "I'm sorry."

"I know you're sorry. I don't think you can quite help your sullenness and temper. You may not know it, but, physically, you're going through a very trying time. You may have feelings that distress and disturb you. And I want you to know that every boy of your age goes through this time and has those feelings. Some more, some less. What I want to tell you is that you mustn't be disturbed and distressed. It isn't the end of the world. It's the beginning."

"The beginning of what?" said Derek.

"Of your manhood. It comes like—like that."

He was going to say "like a thief in the night" but thought better of it.

"But," said Derek, "I haven't any feelings; I'm not disturbed and distressed. I don't know what you're talking about."

John drew a bow at a venture. "I think you do."

"I don't, Father. At least——"

Derek still thought of Hetty. After all, his father didn't know anything about Hetty; nobody knew; yet here he was talking as if he knew.

"Yes?" said John hopefully. He thought it was coming.

"I haven't anything to tell you. I—I've not done anything."

"I never thought you'd done anything. I thought you were unhappy, and I only didn't want you to suffer, all by yourself, Derry."

"It's awfully decent of you."

After all, he could see it was that. Derry had no idea of what his father was driving at, barring Hetty (and it couldn't be Hetty) and barring, well, what he couldn't talk to him about if that was what he meant. Perhaps he did mean that. But it was, yes, awfully decent of him.

So, though the interview had not turned out precisely as his father had hoped, though it left John baffled and disconcerted, still Derry contrived to carry away from it an impression of goodness that would be there at any time ready to help him, a great beneficent something for which he had no word but "decency."

John only felt that he had failed. Derry had eluded his tender probing; he couldn't get at him, couldn't break through the barrier of false reverence and false shame.

He thought: "He was afraid to speak to me."

XII

Five years passed, one like another, bringing the procession of church services, of Sunday school and evening classes, of visiting, of parish teas. Matty sometimes wondered how she got through it all. Her mind was not so subdued to the monotony of her days but that she was aware now and then of the stirring of revolt. It had gone on so long; the people who had been young when Matty came to Wyck were middle-aged now, those who had been middle-aged were old, and fallen into the infirmities of age. Those who had been old were dead.

Sometimes, when John or Milly came in from the village, Matty felt that she did not wish to hear what they had done. Yet it was cruel not to sympathise with Milly; she was so serious, so earnest about it and so eternally cheerful. That cheerfulness of Milly jarred on Matty's tired nerves, yet she nearly always met it smiling, a tender hypocrite.

They would be sitting over their work in the late afternoon and Milly would begin. "Mrs. Trinder's rheumatism doesn't seem to be getting any better."

"Oh, don't go on about the parish, dear."

And Milly would look up with grave, astonished eyes.

"Well, what *can* we talk about?"

"Not Mrs. Trinder's rheumatism. Let's forget it for a minute. If only they'd invent a new disease.

But it's always rheumatism, or else it's bronchitis. I'm so tired of it. You'd be if you'd worked in a parish as long as I have."

"No, Mother, I don't think I should be. And if you didn't work in it what would you do? It's not as if you hunted or played games. There'd be nothing for you."

"I could rest, my dear, and read a little more."

"You wouldn't be content with that for long. You might just as well be working in the parish, Mummy."

"You mean it's all I'm fit for."

"I mean it's probably what you can do best. You've given up all your serious reading."

"I don't seem able to concentrate my mind as I used to. I can't always follow your father when he reads aloud."

"You musn't let yourself get like that, Mummy. I should make a point of reading something worth while every day, if it was only Shakespeare."

"I used to be very fond of Shakespeare. And of Dante. But I've forgotten all my Italian. There never seems to be any time now."

"If it were I, I'd make time. Now, there are all sorts of things I could do with *my* life. Things I've just got to give up."

"What sort of things, dear?"

"I might have been a teacher at Cheltenham."

"Oh, would you have liked that?"

Milly wouldn't, but she wasn't going to say so, and thus diminish her credit in having given it up.

"I'd have liked it well enough, but I thought I ought to stay here and help you and Daddy."

"You're very good to me, Milly."

Every day Milly's goodness was a new wonder to Matty and John. John thought it unlikely that Millicent would marry. She wasn't the marrying sort. He said he would have wished this great happiness for her if she had wished it for herself, but apparently she didn't; marriage was far-off and Milly had never bothered about far-off events; she found her happiness in the little things that lay ready to her hand. Her cheerfulness was incorruptible. And so they continued to think of Milly as the unchangeable, perfect daughter of the house, who would never think of leaving them. Whatever happened, Milly unmarried would always be there to help and comfort them. That was their dream.

This year, nineteen eight, they were wakened from their dream. In the Easter holidays Constance Bartrum came to stay with them for a week-end. Constance Bartrum had been Milly's dearest friend at Cheltenham and she remained her dearest friend after they had left. She was three years older than Milly, and when she had done with school she had stayed on at the Girls' College as a teacher. Now she had given up teaching and was working on a Settlement in the East End of London. Milly's earnestness and cheerfulness were nothing to the cheerfulness and earnestness of Constance.

Constance had a raw, thin face, with a little high nose jutting out from it; her narrow mouth had a tight upper lip and a protruding under one; a pince-nez covered her glassy hazel eyes.

And she talked in a high, cheerful voice about what she called "the work," as if there had been no other. The work was wonderful, exciting, absorbing. There had never been a Settlement like St. Ursula's, so enlightened, so modern, so entirely free from sectarian bigotry. No, it was not a church mission. There was nothing being done in the East End quite like the work.

"I gather," said John, "that you let religion alone."

"Well, there are churches for those who care to go to them. We don't stop them. What *is* religion? We visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and we keep ourselves unspotted from the world."

She laughed as if she had made a joke.

"And we do more. We deal," said Constance, "with prostitution and drunkenness; our night clubs are full of girls from the streets and boys from the public-houses. That's pretty good."

"Very good," said the rector.

She told John that he didn't really know what the poor are like.

"We have poor even in Wyck," he said.

"Yes, but you don't live among them. The Rectory isn't in the heart of a village slum. You're removed from them by a safe and comfortable distance. Work in a country parish is charity-mongering, and it is nothing else."

"Is it? We do *some* educational work; we have our clubs and our classes."

"Yes, but you don't get your prostitutes to come to them."

"No. No, we don't. It's a difficult question in a country village. If they came they'd keep the others away."

"So they must be kept away. There you are. You don't reach the very people that need your help most."

"I'm afraid that is so. One does one's best, but one can't get at them, not at those you mean."

"And we," said Constance triumphantly, "do get at them. You don't know anything about the poor. Really to know them you must live among them."

"I'm sure," said Millicent, "it's the only way."

"Why don't you come down to Poplar, Milly, and look at the work? You might stay a week and see how you liked it. We're a very bright, happy little community."

Constance's eyes glittered and Matty's heart sank as she saw that Constance was marking Milly for her own.

"Oh, Mother, might I?" Milly was eager.

"Do you want very much to go?"

"I want it more than I've ever wanted anything."

To be with Constance for a whole week's communion, to see her actually doing the work, the wonderful work; to see what the poor were really like down in Poplar; to be, if it were only for a week, one of the bright, happy little community, Milly could hardly believe that this could happen to her.

"I may, mayn't I, Mummy?"

"You must ask your father."

"Daddy, I may, mayn't I?"

"Go and stay in Poplar for a week? Well, a week isn't very long. I suppose I must let you go."

He thought: "It'll do her no harm to see what poverty really is. It'll make her love her home all the more. She won't want to stay in Poplar."

But that was precisely what Milly did want. She was so pleased with the bright, happy little community that she couldn't bear to leave it, and the bright, happy little community was so pleased with Milly that it couldn't bear to let her go.

Constance had a long, earnest talk with her on her last night.

"Don't you think, Milly, that you could come and join us?"

"I should love it more than anything. But do you think I should be fit for the work?"

"I don't know anybody fitter. The work wants people like you, young and keen. I never saw anybody with a more distinct vocation. And think—you couldn't have a better field. You're thrown away, Milly, on a little country parish. Just thrown away. You *must* come to us."

"I don't know whether my people would let me."

"They can't stop you. It would be awfully selfish of them. They've no business to stop you. It's your life, Milly; you've a right to your own life."

That was what Milly said to her father and mother. "You've no business to stop me. It's my life. I've a right to my own life."

"My dear, we're not going to stop you, if it really is your life. It would be too dreadfully selfish of us. But

is Poplar your life? Weren't you doing just as good work here in poor little Wyck? We want you badly."

"No, Mother, I can't go on for ever in Wyck. I've exhausted Wyck. Constance is right. It's simply charity-mongering, what we're doing here. There's nothing you and Daddy and the district visitors can't do. Constance says I'm thrown away on Wyck."

"If Constance says it, then of course you are."

"Don't be satirical, Daddy, it doesn't suit your style. Constance knows."

"But, darling, do you think you'll get on with Constance? I couldn't. Always Constance."

"You forget. She's my friend. You don't know her as I do. Oh, Mummy, do think. It's all my life. I shall never have my life again. Not this life. You don't know what it's like down there. The—the bigness of it. If I worked at St. Ursula's I should feel I was doing something great, with great results, something to show for what I put into it. But here, it's all so little, and nothing to show at the end of it. Let me go."

"You haven't thought, Milly, that it'll be more expensive keeping you down there than having you at home."

"Oh, Mother, only so very little more."

"Yes. I'm not worrying about that," said John. "If Milly feels she ought to go, she must go."

"I do feel I ought to go. I feel that this is what I ought to have been doing all my life. It's the one big thing calling me. I can't not go."

"Well, my darling, if you feel like that about it, and Daddy's willing, *I* won't stand in your way."

"You *are* darlings," said Milly.

"We shall miss you dreadfully. I don't know what Daddy and I shall do without you."

"You'll miss me, but you'll go on your dear old way. I shan't make all that difference, you know. Daddy's still got his Miss Minchin."

"Ah, Miss Minchin wouldn't leave me, Milly."

"Miss Minchin's in love with you. *I* wouldn't leave you if I was in that state."

"You'll come home for week-ends, sometimes, and for holidays."

"Yes, rather."

So Milly went to Poplar, but didn't come home. Week-ends were too expensive, and as for the August holiday, she spent it with Constance at Brighton. Constance, she said, wanted her.

"As if we didn't. Oh, John, I feel as if we'd lost her."

"No. No. We mustn't look at it like that. She's doing the right thing, Matty, I feel sure it's the right thing. She's always done the right thing. She needed the larger field, the greater freedom."

He felt that if he had kept her back he would have been guilty of that sin against the Holy Ghost which is tyranny.

"Yes, but she might have come home for the holidays."

"She might."

"Still," said Matty, "it would have been very dull for her down here, poor darling. I'm glad she's enjoying herself at Brighton."

"She'll come at Christmas."

But Milly did not come at Christmas. Christmas was the busiest time at Poplar. She would come at the New Year. And when the New Year came she couldn't get away. And it was the same at Easter and Whitsuntide.

"I have to think," Milly wrote, "of other people's holidays."

And when August came again she went with Constance to Ilfracombe.

"It's extraordinary," said Matty, "her infatuation for that girl. It's a positive obsession."

And Matty said to herself that they had lost her.

Well, there was Derek, and Derek loved his home. He loved it so much that he had thrown up two appointments and come back to it. He had failed to enter any of the professions, failed even to pass his matriculation. Milly wrote home: "*You* may have thought he'd pass, Daddy; I never did." Nobody, not even John and Matty, believed any longer in Derek's intellect. John said, "He may not have much intellect, but he has character. And character, after all, is the great thing." Derek had gone, with a cheerful resignation that did him credit, first into a ship-owner's office in Liverpool, then into a bank in London. And now he had given the bank up and come home. They talked of a provincial bank, in Cheltenham or Gloucester perhaps, where he would not be too far away.

XIII

But though Derek loved his home he was restless and unhappy in it, though he loved his father and mother he was bored when he sat with them in the little drawing-room through the long winter evenings. He would lie on the sofa, yawning, while John read aloud to Matty; then about nine he would get up, stretch himself and go out.

Matty and John would say, "Where are you going to, Derry?" "Where are you going to, my boy?" This eternal question irritated Derek.

And he would answer, "Just going out to stretch my legs a bit."

"I should have thought you'd stretched them enough for one day."

For Derry spent the greater part of his time walking and cycling.

And sometimes he would start off earlier and go round to the Ransomes or the Waddingtons, the Corbetts or the Fieldings, to play bridge. Sometimes he would spend the evening with Miss Minchin, playing to her on her little cracked piano and singing. Miss Minchin had not taken much notice of Derry when he was a little boy, but now that he was grown up she adored him. And every night when he came she made him strong black coffee at ten o'clock, and gave him a glass of sloe gin. He liked to feel that he was giving

pleasure; he liked to be adored, even by Miss Minchin; above all, he liked the black coffee and the little glass of sloe gin. There was no after dinner coffee at the Rectory. And at the other houses they always finished up with whisky and soda at ten o'clock. There was no evening whisky and soda at the Rectory.

And as Derry was never back till after eleven and gave no account of the rest of his evening, Matty and John believed that he stayed till eleven with his friends. As often as not after these evenings Derry would come down in the morning with a splitting headache, or he wouldn't come down at all. And when Matty took his breakfast up to him she would find him too sick to eat it.

"Derry sick again this morning?" John would say.

"Yes. I can't think why. He never used to be like this."

And even then they didn't see. It was not until that awful Sunday that they saw, the Sunday that remained as a terrible night in memory.

Matty had complained of faintness on the Saturday and John had sent for a bottle of old brandy; because of Matty's fits of faintness, it wasn't safe, he said, to be without it. Matty had drunk a teaspoonful of brandy in a small glass of water; that was all, positively all, that had been taken from the bottle. On the Saturday night John had put the bottle away in the dining-room cupboard, which he left unlocked.

On Sunday morning Derry said he had a headache and he wouldn't go to the Morning Service. He would go to church, he said, in the evening; he promised on

his word of honour he would go in the evening. He lay down all afternoon on his bed, and in the evening Matty and John went to church without him.

It was during the Three Collects that the scandal occurred. Miss Minchin, in her pew by the south door, was startled out of her prayer by a noise in the aisle. Looking up from her prayer-book she saw Derek; he was staggering towards her pew as his nearest refuge. The font stopped him; he stood there, swaying slightly, and steadying himself by a clutch on the stone rim. He smiled at Miss Minchin as much as to say, "You see my absurd position." She stared at him in horror. Then he lurched suddenly forward and entered the pew headlong, bent double, his chin dropped on to his breast. Miss Minchin received him in her arms and lowered him gently to the seat beside her. "There," she whispered, "keep still."

Derry stared round him, leaned forward, folded his arms along the pew ledge, bowed his head on them and fell asleep.

Miss Minchin's pew by the south door faced the pulpit; it was thus behind the rectory pew by the chancel which faced the reading desk, so that Matty could not see what was happening there. But John from his place at the reading desk had the south door and Miss Minchin's pew well in sight, and he had seen Derek's dreadful entrance. He made a longer pause than usual between two collects while he took it in; then he recovered, and his voice, louder than it had been and a little strained, went on:

" 'Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord;

and by thy great goodness defend us from all perils and dangers of this night; for the love of thy only Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.'"

And Derek slept. He slept through the Prayer for the King's Majesty, for the Royal Family, for the Clergy and people, and through the Prayer of Saint Chrysostom. He slept through the sermon, when John's eyes gazed at him in sorrow from the pulpit.

The sound of Derek's deep breathing was heard in the pauses of John's voice, so that John had to pitch his voice high and run his sentences together to cover it.

When the service was over a churchwarden, waiting with delicacy till the rector had disappeared into the vestry, helped Derry to his feet. Then Miss Minchin, martyred and devoted, took him by the arm and steered him past the font and out through the south door on to the flagged path of the churchyard. And outside, the cold air had its will of him, and at the church gates, under the light of the hanging lamp, there was a catastrophe. Five persons witnessed it. Derry paused on the step, stooped forward and was ill. By some miracle Miss Minchin saved him from falling. She gathered to herself her ignoble charge and led him again, pitching and staggering, through the crooked lane of Church Street, past the Post Office and the Unicorn, and down Lower Speed hill to the Rectory.

For she said to herself, "He is *his* son, and I'd go through fire and water for *him*."

The dark night hid them from the view of the loiterers gathered on the top of the hill at the cross-roads.

"It's my legs that are drunk," said Derry. "Not me. You don't th-th-think I'm drunk, do you?"

"Well, Derry, I'm afraid I do."

"Can't you see it's my legs? There they go. I'm not my legs." He stopped, and then, very earnestly, "Or am I?"

When they reached the Rectory gate he said, "It's seven hundred and seventy-eight—no, it's seven hundred and ninety miles from the church to here. We've been nine hundred and seventy miles, and I'm tired, and I want to sit down. Lemme sit down."

"No, Derry, you stand up and go in. Come. You can sit down when you've got indoors."

"All ri'. Sit down when I've got indoors. I want to sing.

" 'Yes, I ken John Peel a-and Ru-u-by-y, too,
And Ranter and Ranger and Bellman and True,
From a draw-aw to a find, from a fi-ind to a view,
From a view to a de-eath in the mo-orning.' "

"Oh, Derry, dear Derry, don't. It's Sunday evening."

" 'Do you ken John Peel when he's fa-ar, far away?'
Far, far away, like bells at evening peal-ing,
The voice of Jesus sounds o'er land and sea,
And laden souls, by thousands meekly steal-ing,
Kind Shepherd, turn their weary steps—to—thee.
Angels of Je-sus, A-ANGELS OF LIGHT,
SING-ING TO WE-ELCOME THER PILGRIMS OF THER NIGHT.' "

The last fortissimo notes brought old Mary, the Rectory servant, running to the garden gate.

"Who is it," she said, "with Mr. Derry?"

"It's me, Miss Minchin. I've brought him home. He's in a sad state."

" 'An-gels of Jesus!' " sang Derry.

"Hush, Mr. Derry, for shame! If you'll take one arm, Miss, I'll take the other."

Between them they got Derry up the garden walk and into the house, where they laid him on the drawing-room sofa.

"We'll leave 'im there till the rector comes. 'E'll get 'im up to bed."

"Don't tell them I brought him home, Mary. "

"No, Miss. It'll break the rector's heart, that it will. They 'aven't seen him like this."

"Is it the first time?"

"Lor no, Miss. I've seen 'im a plenty times. Put 'im to bed I 'ave and said nothing about it. But 'e's never been as bad as this. You must have had a job to get him along."

"I must go, Mary. I don't want them to find me here."

She went slowly up the hill, where she managed to slip past Matty and the rector unseen.

And though the event had been remarkable and her own part in it great, Miss Minchin never told a soul. There were plenty to do that who had seen the poor boy in church and at the church gates.

And as they walked down the hill together, John prepared Matty for what she would find when she got home.

"Did you see Derek come into church?" he said.

"No. Did he come?"

"He did, I'm sorry to say."

"Sorry?"

"Yes, Matty, he wasn't fit to come."

"How do you mean, not fit? Oh, yes, of course, his poor head."

"It wasn't his poor head. I don't know how to tell you, dear, but I'm afraid he was the worse for drink."

"You don't mean he was——" she couldn't say it.

"Yes, he was. He got into Miss Minchin's pew, of all places. I looked about for him after service, and Kimber told me he had gone. I don't know how he got home, if he did get home."

"Did he—did he do anything in church?"

"He fell asleep. He came in during the Collects and he slept through everything to the end."

And then they went in and found him lying on the sofa in his drunken sleep. Mary had been afraid to light the lamp. The firelight flickered on his flushed face, his heavy, dark-fringed eyelids, his open mouth. Even drunk and with his mouth open, he was beautiful. John and Matty stooped over him and took his hot, infected breath. The helplessness, the pathos of his sleep touched them, and they felt no anger, only an infinite grief.

Matty burst into tears. "Oh, John, I cannot bear it. My Derry, my darling Derry."

"Don't cry, darling. It's the first time. Perhaps it'll never happen again."

"How could it have happened?"

"I can't think."

Then he remembered.

"He must have got at that brandy."

And sure enough, when he went to the dining-room cupboard, John found the bottle empty except for half an inch of spirit.

Matty had followed him. She saw him hold the bottle up to the light.

"John—is it possible? Why, it was full last night. I only had a teaspoonful out of it."

John shook his head. He felt helpless, overwhelmed by this disaster. It was worse, worse than anything that had ever happened to him, than anything that ever could happen. Their Derry. Their Derry.

"No wonder the poor boy's drunk," he said. "I'll lock this damned stuff in the cellar."

Then old Mary and the rector between them carried Derry to his room, undressed him and put him in his bed, while Matty sat in the drawing-room and cried. She looked at the sofa cushion with the deep dent in it where Derry's heavy head had lain.

"Oh, my darling, my darling."

She felt as she would have felt if they had come in and found Derry dead.

Presently John came down and comforted her. She put her arms round his neck and clung to him.

"Oh, John, I can't bear it. Here's Milly gone and Derek drinking. I've no one but you."

"Well, well, we have each other. Don't worry about Derek. It's the first time and it shall be the last."

John was convinced that it was the first time, a sin of ignorance, an accident due to the fatal presence of the brandy, a sudden overwhelming temptation at the

start, then Derry, too tipsy to know what he was doing, had gone on till not a drop was left. It was like the day of the chocolates, and like the day of the chocolates it was over and would never happen again.

And the next day John went up to Derry in his bed, where he lay sorry and sick. Sorry, nobody could have been sorrier than Derry.

"Derry, do you know that you were drunk last night?"

"Was I? Well, I suppose I was."

"Do you know that you came into Evening Service in a shocking state?"

"Did I? That was pretty beastly of me. I say, Daddy, I *am* sorry. Did I make an awful ass of myself?"

"You made a beast of yourself, my son."

"I wonder how I got home. I don't seem to remember anything about it."

"Well, mercifully you did get home, instead of lying in the nearest ditch."

"Well, I may have been drunk last night, but see what a head I've got this morning."

"Yes, I think you're punished." He paused. "Derry, was it the first time?"

Derry's blue eyes looked at him with candour.

"The first time? Oh, no, not by a long chalk. I'm getting used to it."

"Derry, is that true?"

"Absolutely true. Well—you asked me and I wasn't going to lie to you; I'm not that sort of skunk. And I'm sorry, Daddy, I'm frightfully sorry. I didn't

mean you to know about it, I didn't, really. I knew you wouldn't like it."

"It's better that I should know. Then we can face this thing together. Tell me, is this craving something you feel you can easily overcome, or is it an irresistible temptation to you? Do you drink because you want to, or because you must?"

"Neither," said Derek. "I don't want to and there's no must about it. Nobody need drink unless they jolly well choose, and anybody can stop any minute. *I* could stop if I chose."

John thought: "I've heard Charles say that again and again, and yet nothing could stop *him*."

"Why don't you choose?" he said, feeling the futility of his own question. Why didn't Charles choose?

"I don't know why not. I don't know why I do it. Unless it is that there's nothing else to do in this rotten hole."

"Then, Derry, you must get something to do."

"Don't worry, Father, it shan't happen again."

John thought: "It is not the first time, but it will be the last. He is really sorry."

It was not the last time.

Derry got a job in a bank in Cheltenham, and they didn't know what was happening to him there, until one evening he came home in what they called a sad state, having got drunk before he started. That night John and Matty carried him to bed, and Matty cried again.

And in the morning Derry was sorry and swore on

his honour it shouldn't happen again; he had got with some fellows and they were all drinking and he was in for it before he knew where he was. He wouldn't have got drunk if he hadn't been drunk. And they believed him and said, "Now it will never happen again." And it happened again and again, till a day came when Derry had to leave the bank at Cheltenham, dismissed for intemperance. The manager wrote to Derry's father in sorrow. The boy was a nice boy and good at his work, he couldn't wish for a better clerk, but he was so unsteady that he couldn't keep him. He believed that he had got in with a drinking set in the town, and suggested his removal to a branch of their bank at Wyck-on-the-Hill, where, the manager said, he would be under your own eye.

So Derek was removed to a branch of his bank at Wyck, where he continued to get drunk under his father's eye. But for a long time he was careful to keep sober in banking hours. It was on a Saturday evening that he let himself go, which gave him all Sunday to recover in.

And John went round to all the inns in Wyck, to the Unicorn, and the White Hart, the Queen's Head, and the King's Head, the Talbot Arms, the Bell, and the Three Magpies, and told the landlords not to serve his son with any drink. And they all obeyed him except the landlord of the Three Magpies, who was a new man, a stranger in the place, and didn't care. At the Three Magpies Derek was served with all the drink he wanted, and sometimes he made love to the barmaid at the Unicorn and got a little more that way.

And John's back bowed under his burden; he went stooping like an old man. Deep lines of anxiety marked his face, and in these first days of Derek's drunkenness signs of nervous trouble showed in a slight twitching of the left side of his mouth.

"It would have been better," he said, "if Derry hadn't got his job at the bank, since his earnings went in drink."

Then came the holidays, and with his earnings Derry went off to London.

He came back in delirium.

John sat up with him all night, while Derek shuddered and cried out, and saw black snakes crawling over the white counterpane.

After that Derek was always frightened when he had been drinking, and John and Matty would lie awake waiting for the moment when the door would open and Derek would come and sit on their bed, afraid, like a child, to be left alone.

John had a bed made up for him in his son's room, so that he could sleep with him when his drunken fright came on him.

Then Matty, in her bed alone, would cry herself to sleep.

"John," she said, "how can he have got like that? It can't have happened all at once that Sunday."

"It didn't happen all at once. It must have been going on all the time without our knowing. I don't know how long."

"But why? Why? It isn't as if it was in my family."

"No, but it is in mine."

"Oh, Charles. What's that got to do with it? He's only an uncle."

"I mean," said John, "my father drank. I oughtn't to have married you, Matty. I oughtn't to have brought this on you. But I didn't know. I thought if I was all right my children would be. I thought Derry's bringing up would make all the difference, that environment would count more than heredity, that I could see to it that he went straight. God forgive me."

"Don't, John. Don't talk as if it was your fault. It isn't. It's far more likely to be my indulgence of him. And Derry must take some responsibility. He says he could have stopped it any minute if he had chosen."

"Yes, but could he? That's what I ask myself. In the beginning, perhaps, but not now. And this life of ours helped to drive him to it. He was bored."

"No. It isn't Wyck. Look what he did in Cheltenham. And in London. If Derry lived in a big town he'd go altogether to the bad. He's safer here with us than he would be anywhere else."

"Well, we haven't saved him."

So they talked.

And John went about his parish sad and humiliated because he had not saved his son. What use was it to try and save other people if he couldn't save his own son? With what sort of face could he preach against drunkenness who had a drunkard for his son?

Every drunkard in the parish, every prostitute, was a reproach to him, for he had not reclaimed them. Every backslider wrung his heart. He bore in his heart the sins of the whole parish and of his son. Almost he lost

his belief in the sanctity of humanity, almost his faith in God. He had to tell himself that he was not alone in his suffering, these agonies had gone on since the world began, since ever man had a soul to be agonised over and saved. If he had not doubted God's goodness before his own trial came to him, why should he doubt it now? Drunkenness was Derek's only fault. Was God's universe to be arraigned because Derek drank? So John reasoned with himself, till in his contemplation of the infinite and common woe his own part in it showed less large and he knew himself and his place in God's universe. A little place to work in, a little place to suffer in; he must not let Derek take up too much room in it. He had another child.

But Millicent never came, and they were glad now that she kept away.

And there was Matty. Matty built up again his broken world. Matty filled his world. He turned to Matty and was at peace. In Matty God had blessed him above all his deserving. How could he doubt God's goodness when he had Matty? They had never loved each other more than they did now in the day of their trouble and their shame. Nothing could take Matty away from him.

They had no comfort but in each other.

XIV

The tea-party at the Rectory had lasted nearly an hour. Mrs. Fielding, Mrs. Markham of Wyck Wold, young Mr. Hawtrey of Medlicott and his wife, young Mrs. Horatio Waddington, Sir John and Lady Corbett of Underwoods and Miss Minchin were there.

They had started and pursued several topics: the hay harvest and the crops, the Rose Show at Underwoods, the tennis tournament at Wyck Manor, Mrs. Fielding's delphiniums; topics that flourished in their season, died down, and sprang up again every year. Spun out, with comments on each player, the tennis tournament had lasted quite a long time.

John had been sent for in the middle of tea, and Matty was taking his place as best she could. She listened with the little strained air of polite interest which was her main contribution to the traffic of society. Every now and then it was answered by the smile of affectionate sympathy that Fanny Waddington sent across the room. Fanny's smile said plainly, "The others are boring me horribly, but you are a darling and I love you."

Then the talk languished. Somebody had to revive it. Old Mrs. Markham did.

"Has anybody called on Mrs. Rawling?"

"I haven't," said Adeline Fielding. "But then I never call on anybody. Can't be bored."

"I have not," said Lady Corbett, "and I do not intend to."

"You must draw the line somewhere," said Sir John.

"Why draw it at Mrs. Rawling? I've called," said Matty.

"So have I," said Fanny.

"You have to, my dear Matty," said Mrs. Markham. "It's a parish affair. As for Fanny, she calls on everybody because she likes to be kind."

"If anybody else is thinking of calling on Mrs. Rawling," said Lady Corbett, "all I can say is, 'Don't.'"

"Why ever not?" said Matty. "She's quite a nice little woman. Her manners are as pretty as her face."

"Her manners, my dear, are not pretty at all."

"Oh, come," said Fanny, "you forget we've seen her."

"Perhaps I ought to have said her morals."

"Oh, well," said Fanny, "I haven't seen *them*."

"If there's a scandal," said Adeline Fielding, "let's hear it."

"No, don't let's hear it. I'm sure there isn't one," said Matty.

"So am I," said Miss Minchin.

"I hope there is," said Adeline. "Anybody who creates a scandal in Wyck is a public benefactor."

"Would you call George Simpkin a public benefactor?" said Sir John Corbett.

"It depends on what he's done."

"He's been making love to Mrs. Rawling."

"Dear man," said Adeline, "how nice of him."

"As he isn't likely to have made it in public," said Matty, "I don't see how anybody knows."

"He was seen," said Lady Corbett, "kissing her in his back garden, behind the lilac bush."

"The back garden was better than the front one," said Adeline, "but the lilac bush seems to have been unnaturally transparent. I want more evidence."

"They make no secret of it. She goes about boasting that George Simpkin is in love with her."

"The wretch," said Mrs. Markham, "a married man and a churchwarden, and at his age, too."

"I don't believe a word of it," said Matty.

"Nor I," said Miss Minchin, making a strong resolution not to pass this story on.

"And I don't want to hear any more about it. It's most cruel to go saying these things about the poor little woman behind her back," said Matty.

"We couldn't very well say them to her face," said Adeline.

"I should like to see old Simpkin's face when I tax him with it," said Sir John.

"Oh," said Miss Minchin, "you couldn't do that."

"Couldn't I? I know old George quite well enough for that. I don't blame him. Pretty little woman, Mrs. Rawling, fresh as paint. And with that wife of his always nagging him it's no wonder if he turns to somebody who's kind."

"Kind? Really, Sir John, you're as bad as he is." Thus Mrs. Markham.

"I hope not," said Lady Corbett.

"You don't nag at me, my dear."

"What is Mr. Rawling doing about it?" asked Mrs. Markham.

"Nothing, presumably," said Sir John. "He's dead."

"A widow, then."

"I don't suppose her infidelities worry him much where he is now, poor thing," said Adeline.

"Please, please don't go on talking about it. John would hate it so if he were here. *I* hate it."

"It's a pity that what amuses us should hurt you, Matty."

"It does hurt me."

"It hurts me, too," said Miss Minchin.

Before her conversion she had been what Adeline called a perfect god-send to the village. No scandal escaped her. Now you couldn't get anything out of her; she was playing up to the Rectory all the time.

"I'd rather talk about Mrs. Hinton's bad leg, if we must talk about people," said Matty.

"But that would hurt us, and it wouldn't amuse you. It really wouldn't."

"No, it wouldn't amuse me."

"How is Millicent getting on?" said Mrs. Markham.

"Oh, splendidly. She's keener about her work than ever."

"Jolly good of her," said Sir John.

"Millicent *is* good," said Matty.

But Millicent's goodness, which they had all heard of before, was not, like Mrs. Rawling, a subject to nourish conversation, and presently, one after another, the tea-party got up and went.

Adeline Fielding talked with Sir John Corbett going up the hill.

"No wonder poor Matty's so afraid of a scandal when she's got one in her own family."

"Yes. Beastly thing to happen to a parson. Got to preach at us all the time and can't keep his own cub in order."

"He's a charming boy, too, when he isn't drunk. Awful pity."

"And that girl; queer thing she can't live at home."

"Oh, Millicent. I've no patience with her. And they expect you to say 'How good of her.'"

"I said it," said Sir John.

"Well, I didn't. It's pure selfishness, if you ask me. Now Matty really *is* good."

"Good as they make 'em. So's he."

And Matty sat in her empty drawing-room and waited for John to come in. Her tea-party had bored and saddened her, and her mind was in revolt. She had listened to that sort of conversation a hundred times, and she would have to listen to it a hundred times again. You couldn't stop people talking scandal; it was all very well to say "Don't listen," they went on just the same; they did even when you implored them not to, they couldn't believe you didn't love it; there was nothing in the world they loved so much; it was life to them; they had been like dead things before poor little Mrs. Rawling had been dragged in, and then, suddenly, they had all revived, their eyes had shone, their mouths had positively quivered with the desire to hunt Mrs. Rawling down. Next time it would be

the same, and the next and the next; if it wasn't scandal, it would be some silliness.

And Matty was sick and tired of it all; she was tired of the village, tired of her progress up and down the same little streets, tired of seeing always the same faces, tired of Sir John's fat, sensual laugh and Lady Corbett's simper, tired of Adeline Fielding's dimpled smile of self-admiration, tired of the ecstatic rolling of Miss Minchin's eyes towards John. She was tired of her sick people's whining voices, tired of her own voice pouring out its sympathies and consolations. It seemed to her that she never had anything to say. What could you say to an old woman who had had a bad leg for twenty years? Nothing but her eternal "I'm so sorry, it must be very bad to bear." Worse even, more demented, was her dreadful optimism over Mrs. Trinder's rheumatism. "You'll be all right, Mrs. Trinder, when the warm weather comes. I shall see you running about with the young people."

"Eh, I wur a rare un to run when I wur young. But I shall run no more. Run no more I shall."

"Yes, Mrs. Trinder, you will. You wait till the sun comes out."

What was the good of it all, when Mrs. Trinder knew and Matty knew, and Mrs. Trinder knew that she knew that Mrs. Trinder would run no more, sun or no sun?

Never had her conversation with Mrs. Trinder appeared to Matty more futile than it did to-day. And oh, the endless angelic goodness of the poor people who smiled at you whatever you did, and received your inane remarks as if they had been gorgeous witticisms.

In her weariness Matty forgot that she had been really sorry for Mrs. Trinder, and that she had been quite excited when Mrs. Mabbitt consulted her about Nellie Mabbitt's frock for the school treat.

"Shall it be white, m'm, or a pretty blue?"

"Oh, I think a pretty blue. Only it must be really pretty."

And Matty had chosen the blue, and none of the children had had a prettier frock than Mrs. Mabbitt's Nellie that day.

Matty had forgotten Nellie's frock and a thousand little things like it that she had enjoyed because of her poor people's joy in them. She had forgotten that she loved her poor people and that her love had made them hers. She was so tired, so tired. She longed to get away from Wyck for a while, and see another place and hear another kind of conversation, some place where she wouldn't have any poor people to look after, conversation where everybody would be gay and witty and intellectual, where all the time she would be interested and amused. To go to London, to stay with Philip and Susan, to mix again with those wonderful, brilliant people. It was like her old longing for the shining miracle, the miracle that didn't happen, only it was now a longing that had no hope in it, longing with heaviness at its heart.

For she couldn't leave John; he hated her to leave him. She had done it long ago, three or four times, going up to London for a week to stay with Susan or her mother, or with Aunt Fanny at Cheltenham, and John had been so miserable without her that the last

time Matty had said, "Never again." And John wouldn't go with her; he had grown so used to his home and his parish that he hated leaving them, he never seemed to want, as she wanted, to be in some other place. He went his way undisturbed and everlastingly content. He drew upon some source of spiritual strength within himself and went on, went on. But he was only happy when Matty was there. He loved his home, and when Matty was away his home broke up around him and he couldn't find himself in it.

Matty was so tired that she cried. John found her crying.

"Crying, Matty? Has anything happened?"

His arms went round her, the arms that were always the arms of her lover.

"No, nothing's happened. I think I'm crying because nothing ever can. I'm so tired, John, so tired."

"But tired of what, my darling?"

"Of things not happening."

"Isn't it rather a good thing that they don't?"

Derry had been dismissed from the bank a month ago, that was the last thing that had happened, and, deplorable as it was, it had its bright side, for ever since then, having no money to spend, Derry had kept sober.

"Perhaps I mean the same thing always happening. I'm tired of people coming to tea, I'm tired of the parish, I'm tired of housekeeping, I'm tired of everything but you."

"Aren't you even a little tired of me?"

"No, darling, I am not. I never could be."

"And yet," he said, "it would be good for you to get away from me for a little while."

"Not from you. From the parish and Lady Corbett, and her silly scandals."

"What, another!"

"Yes, another."

"Bless me, I can't think how they manage it."

"Nor I."

"What imaginations they must have. No wonder you're tired, darling. Now, don't you think if you were to get away for a few weeks it would do you all the good in the world?"

"I can't leave you, John. You know you hate being left."

"I hate being left. But I'd hate still more not being left. What you want is a thorough change. I ought to have seen that you wanted it. Supposing you were to ask Susan to take you for a little while."

"I shouldn't be happy without you, thinking of you all alone here."

"I'm not alone. I've got Derry."

"That's it. I don't like leaving you with Derry in case he breaks out again."

"He won't, and if he does I shall be thankful you're not there to see. Now, if you don't write to Susan I shall write myself."

And after a little more argument and a little more persuasion Matty consented to write to Susan.

Susan wrote back and said she would be delighted to have dear, darling Matty for as long as she cared to

stay. Philip would be delighted. Susan promised her that if she would come soon, before everybody went away, she could show her lots of interesting people. And Matty wrote and said she would go that day week, which was a Monday. She wrote to her mother and to Milly, too, to say she was coming to London, and her mother said she must stay at Ormonde Terrace for half of her time, and Milly invited her to come and stay at the Settlement for a few days and "have a look at the work."

So it was settled that Matty should stay at St. Ursula's from Monday to Thursday, and then go on to Ormonde Terrace for a week, and finish up with a week at Acacia Road.

And Matty had brought down her old best hat and re-trimmed it for London. John had come in and found her stitching, and had smiled at her in compassion and said, "If you're going to London hadn't you better buy a new hat there?"

And Matty had answered firmly, "No. I am *not* going to be extravagant."

"Not even to please me?"

"Not even to please you. Buy a hat, indeed, when I've made this one as good as new!"

"I should like to rig you out in new clothes from head to foot."

"You wouldn't. You hate things you aren't used to. You wouldn't know me in a new gown."

It was so long since she had had one.

On the Saturday night Matty's trunk was half packed, ready for Monday morning, and Matty counted

the hours till she could go. She was excited like a child; she couldn't believe she was going to London on Monday.

And when Monday came Matty did not go. For John, walking all day in the rain on Saturday without an umbrella, developed a temperature and a bronchial cough on Sunday night, and on Monday morning he was worse.

"I might have known it would happen. He'd never have caught cold if I hadn't been going away."

"You talk as if he did it on purpose to stop you," said Derek.

"Oh, no, poor darling, he'd never stop me. I mean my going was enough to make him ill. It was the signal. It's just that it wasn't to happen. If you want a thing too much it never does happen."

John, in his bed, was sitting up with Matty's nice vicuna shawl over his shoulders, waiting for the steaming creosote to be brought for him to inhale. There was still an hour before Matty's train left.

"Don't miss your train looking after me, darling," he said, when Matty and Derek came in with the creosote.

"Miss it? You don't suppose I'm going? And leave you here ill."

"I shall be all right. Derry'll look after me. Won't you, Derry?"

"Rather. Really I think you could go, Mother."

"I won't. I shouldn't have a minute's peace if I did."

"All I want," said John, "is to stay in bed and keep warm."

"Yes, and I'll see that you do it. I'd rather nurse you than go to all the Londons in the world."

It was true. Matty never loved people so much as when she could tuck them up in bed and look after them. Her heart was wrung when she saw John sitting up, wrapped in the shawl, and waiting gently for something to be done for him, with his dog's eyes that trusted her to do the right thing. And the thought of London and all that she was to have done there went from her.

"Your father isn't as strong as he was," she said when she and Derek were downstairs again. "I don't like him getting this sort of cold."

"Nonsense. He'll get over it all right. Anybody can have a cold."

"Not a bronchial cold," said Matty.

And they kept on making him inhale creosote six or seven times a day. But the creosote didn't cure John. The cold fastened on his lungs with, first a touch of congestion, then a touch of pleurisy. He lay in a fever, drawing his breath with great pain.

And as she looked at him lying there, helpless, Matty thought, "However could I dream of leaving him? How could I have wanted to go?"

Millicent wrote, "How tiresome of father to go and get ill and stop your coming. Tell him to hurry up and get better."

"Unfeeling little brute," said Derek.

Then Matty wrote to Milly and asked her to come down and help to nurse her father, and Milly wrote back:

"Darling Mother,

"I'm ever so sorry Daddy isn't so well. I'd come down like a shot, only I can't leave the Settlement just now. The work is heavier than ever; there's an outbreak of flu, and all my time is taken up looking after my sick people. I'm sure you'll understand. My love to Daddy; tell him he must get well for all our sakes. "Your loving

"Milly."

"Didn't I tell you she was a selfish beast?" said Derek.

"No, Derry, it isn't selfishness. She has her own work to do. She doesn't realise how ill your father is."

"She doesn't want to," said Derek.

"Is Milly coming?" said John, when they went to him.

"No, darling. She can't get away at present."

"Quite right; quite right. I wouldn't have her leave her work for me."

And Derek nursed his father while Milly kept away. He sat up with him night after night. He made the poultices and put them on. He lifted him in his strong arms as Matty changed the sheets. His hands were gentle as a woman's, there was nothing to be done for John that they did not do. And through all the time of his father's illness he kept sober. Dr. Ransome praised him.

And the Fieldings and the Corbetts, the Waddingtons and the Markhams and the Hawtreys called to hear how the rector was, and sent flowers and fruit; and the par-

sons from the neighbouring parishes for miles round and the townspeople and the poor people called, the very nonconformists called, and that pleased Matty more than anything. It showed, she said, how John was loved. He had always been kind to the nonconformists, always stood up for them when Edward Farrar and the other parsons abused them. And Miss Minchin called and offered to sit up at night, and cried when she was told that John was too ill to see her.

"Think of poor old Daddy waking up in the night and seing Miss Minchin sitting beside him."

"Don't, Derry," said his mother, "she is very kind. Everybody is very kind."

They were so kind that Matty had a pang of remorse when she remembered how she had felt about them. They might talk scandal, they might say silly things, they might bore you from morning till night, but when you were in trouble they were kind. Why couldn't she always be kind? Why couldn't she always look at the best side of people, as John did, instead of dwelling on all their little faults? She thought: "My own fault of intolerance is worst of all."

At last John got better. A heavenly day came when he was well enough to sit up in his chair and eat a sweetbread. The news went all over the village—"The rector is sitting up. He has eaten a sweetbread." And Miss Minchin went round and told all the poor people about it, and there was rejoicing even among the drunkards and prostitutes of the Backs.

Then, when it was all over and John was about again, Matty had a nervous breakdown. Dr. Ransome, with

the air of imparting a discovery, said that what she wanted was a complete change of ideas and surroundings, and if she still wanted to go to London, London would be the best place she could go to. No good burying herself at the seaside and being bored. Only she mustn't tire herself, and he didn't advise her to stay long in Poplar.

So on a Saturday Matty's trunk was packed again, and on the Monday she went to London.

Leaving John was dreadful, but, all the same, Matty started with a little tremor of joy and excitement. She would see darling Milly, she would see mother and father, she would see Susan and Philip and the wonderful, clever people. She longed for the good talk that fizzed and sparkled and put fire into you. She knew what it would be like; she was going back, back, to the brilliant, thrilling life that had once been her own.

XV

St. Ursula's. It stood in a terrace a little way back from the street, two brown-brick houses that had been knocked into one. The doors and window-frames were painted royal blue, gay blue curtains hung at all the windows, and there was a milk-white and sky-blue imitation Della Robbia Madonna and Child over the door you went in by.

"The Madonna was *my* idea, Mummy. What do you think of her?"

"I think she's beautiful."

"We do make the rest of the street look a bit dingy, but it can't be helped. We've got to be bright and attractive, so that people who pass by may look at us and wonder what we are."

"I see."

They went in. Milly opened a door on the right of the passage, and Matty found herself in a large room furnished in fumed oak, where all the chairs and sofas had blue linen covers. In the recesses by the chimney-place there were bookshelves filled with books, and in the middle of the room a round table covered with newspapers and magazines.

"This," said Milly, "is the place where we rest and amuse ourselves when we've got time off. But there never is very much time. Jolly, isn't it? It was my idea to have blue. They left all the decorations to me, because they say I've got such good taste, and really, Mummy, don't you think I have?"

She led the way across the passage and opened a door on the left. Matty saw an austere room, a stained floor without carpet or rugs, a long narrow table covered with a blue and white check cloth, having a row of wooden chairs at either side.

"The dining-room?"

Milly corrected her. "The refectory."

"How monastic you are."

"Well, we are a sort of order. A lay order. I'm Sister Millicent."

She took Matty up to her room, a little whitewashed room that had the bare simplicity of a nun's cell.

"I hope you'll be comfy."

"I shall be very comfy." She put her arms round Milly's neck. "Darling, how good it is to see you again."

Milly gave her a calm kiss and detached herself.

"It's very jolly. How's Daddy?"

"Quite well now. I hated leaving him. But he was dear about it."

"You did understand how it was I couldn't come down?"

"Yes, my dear. I knew you couldn't leave your work here."

The work takes my whole life, Mummy. It leaves me nothing for myself."

"Nor for us," thought Matty.

"You still love it?" she said.

"Yes. I'm awfully keen. I'm the keenest of the lot, Miss Bankes says. Miss Bankes is our Warden. She looks to me to keep them all up to the mark."

"I'm sure you do," said Matty.

She thought: "Milly is wonderful. So good, so good."

"When you've done your hair, Mummy, I'll take you down to the refectory for tea. They'll all be there."

"Will they? My dear, I'm just a little bit afraid of them."

"You needn't be. We're a cheerful crowd. All except Miss Bankes."

"Why not Miss Bankes?"

"Oh, she had an unhappy love affair and never got over it. That's why she came here."

"My dear Milly, I oughtn't to know that."

"That's all right. We all know it. You've got to know so as to understand her. I'm so glad I haven't had a love affair."

"It might not have been an unhappy one."

"Anyhow," said Milly. "I don't want to be happy that way."

"I wish you could be, darling."

"Why, what could it do for me?"

Matty couldn't say what it would have done for Milly; she thought Milly was perfect.

In the refectory the bright, happy little community was gathered at the long table which was set with a service of leadless glaze. Large plates of thick bread and butter were placed up and down the table, a pot of jam and jar of treacle stood between.

Matty was introduced to Miss Bankes, who was Sister Margaret. Sister Margaret was handsome, haggard and resigned. She said she was very glad to see Matty, shook hands limply, and gazed at her with

large, desolate eyes. Matty was sorry for Miss Bankes because of her unhappy love affair.

Constance Bartrum, rawer and thinner than ever, came forward and greeted Matty with exaggerated cheerfulness.

"How delightful, how delightful to see you here, dear Mrs. Crawford. I hope you will like our little community. Three of us are absent; we should be ten; but you'll see us all at dinner-time."

She looked up and down the table with an encouraging air as if she signalled for brightness and happiness to begin.

And Matty was presented in turn to Sister Gertrude, Sister Nancy, Sister Marion and Sister Catherine. She sat at the end of the table between Miss Bankes at the head and Milly.

And the conversation began.

"Sister Margaret, have you settled whether Minnie Pringle is to go into the weaving or the laundry?"

"No. Minnie isn't out of the isolation-room yet."

"Isolation?" said Matty.

"You won't get it, Mother."

"Yes, very sad, Mrs. Crawford, these girls off the streets have to be kept under observation for disease."

Sister Nancy cried out, "I say, slumming does make you hungry."

Sister Nancy was the youngest. She bloomed and fattened in her slum, on the plain, plentiful food of the refectory.

"I should have thought," said Matty, "it would have taken your appetite away."

"Nothing," said Constance, "could take Nancy's appetite away."

"Sister, the Bodgerses aren't coming to the carving class."

"Why not, Gertrude?"

"Because they've got the itch."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Crawford, these details——"

"Oh, never mind me," said Matty, "I'm hardened."

"You think you are, Mummy; but you wait. I can show you things."

"When you've *quite* done with that loaf, dear, I should like some bread."

"They'd have come," said Sister Gertrude, "if I hadn't stopped them. They saw no reason why not."

"Jam or treacle, Mummy?"

Matty chose treacle, to show that she entered into the spirit of the refectory.

Constance rose. "Well, good-bye, Sister. I've got two maternity cases in the East India Dock Road."

"By the way," said Milly, "did you know that Mrs. Curtis has got puerperal fever? That means I can't take on any more."

"Good for you," said Sister Nancy.

After tea Milly tucked her mother up on the sofa in the rest-room with a book and went visiting in Limehouse. She stayed out till dinner-time. After dinner the carving class claimed her. The next day it was the same thing; Matty was left to amuse herself with her book all morning, and in the afternoon Milly took her round the Settlement. She showed her the class-rooms,

the library, the rooms for wood carving and basket work, the weaving-room and the hand laundry. Between tea and dinner Milly rested in her cubicle; in the evening she had another class. On Wednesday she went to her classes in the morning and in the afternoon she took her mother to Limehouse to see two or three poor families. "The real thing, Mummy, not poor people all nice and tidied up and polite as they are at Wyck."

Matty was saddened by the sight. Milly tried to reassure her. "Oh, but you mustn't take them tragically, Mummy. If I took them tragically I shouldn't do them any good. I make a point of being cheerful, on principle."

It was wonderful how Milly met them, always bright and firm and competent, with the right word at every turn. And at every turn she called on her mother to observe and admire her methods. Matty could see that the work of the Settlement was superbly done by Milly. Done with a peculiar smooth swing, a rhythm, a technique that raised it almost to an art. Yet she felt that there was something wanting, the human bond, the warmth, the love given and returned, something that they had at Wyck and had not at St. Ursula's.

After tea she sat with Milly in the empty rest-room. She tried to talk, but Milly was distant and preoccupied; she could see that she wasn't listening, her mind had gone off somewhere far away, and it was not for her to catch and hold it. In the evening they went to a concert in the club-room next door. And on Thursday Matty left Poplar.

"Those cases I showed you yesterday were typical," said Milly in the cab.

"We haven't types and cases in Wyck, Milly; only people."

"How do you mean, Mother? You mean something; I can tell by the little voice you said it in."

"Do you love your types, Milly?"

"I've no time to sentimentalise over them, if that's what you mean. There'd be no sense in it. The scale's too big."

"There's something to be said for poor little Wyck. We get something on the small scale you lose on the big."

"What do you get?"

"Love, Milly; just love. You talk about the real thing, but love's the realest thing."

"Oh, *that*," said Milly. She was so sensible.

"But I've no right to talk when I'm not giving up my whole life. And I haven't your gift. You're splendid, Milly."

"Well, anyhow, I'm glad you've seen the work. Now you'll realise what it's like."

"Yes, I realise what it's like."

She realised, too, that it was time for her to go. She wasn't really wanted. Her visit had been nothing but an interruption to the work. Milly had wound herself up for three days of it, and somehow she had made her mother aware that she could not have borne a day more.

Matty was glad to get back to Ormonde Terrace; she knew that her mother and father wanted her, and that

her presence would be a comfort and a joy to them. It hadn't been a comfort and a joy to Milly. But mother and father were very old and they couldn't go about with her; there was nothing to do but sit and talk over old things that had happened long ago.

"I remember as if it was yesterday that time you came down with your hair done on the top of your head."

"Fancy your remembering that, Mother."

"Do you remember Alice's wedding, Matty? And those pretty frocks you and Susan wore? You never had anything that became you better."

"Do you know, Mother, I had that frock on when I first met John."

"Had you? No wonder he fell in love with you. You aren't so particular about your clothes as you used to be, love."

"I mustn't be particular. I can't afford to spend money on dressing myself. There are all our people and Milly and Derry."

"Derry oughtn't to be living at home doing nothing," said Father. "And Milly ought to be earning something."

"Oh, Milly couldn't give up her work at St. Ursula's. We mustn't expect her to. Does she ever come out and see you?"

Mother said, "Once in a while, my dear. Once in two years"; and Father said, "We're rather far away from Poplar."

Matty felt that she was far away from Poplar, too. She would never get Milly back again.

Matty's old gown never looked so shabby as it did at Susan's; she was floppy and bunchy when everybody else was straight and slim. Susan wore a tailor-made suit which was the last expression of the fashion of nineteen twelve; Matty's gown, which was three years old, had been made in a fashion of Matty's own.

"My dear," said Susan, "where do you get your clothes?"

"I don't get them," Matty said. "I make them."

"That's very clever of you," said Susan; but the very next day she took Matty to her own tailor, and gave her a coat and skirt as a present for the birthday Matty had had some weeks ago. And on the night of the party in Austin Mitchell's studio she lent her her own second-best evening-gown of a rich dark-blue silk, in which Matty said she felt *too* well-dressed.

"You aren't a bit too well-dressed, you carry it off beautifully. That blue suits your nice grey hair."

Matty felt strange and unlike herself in Susan's gown, she couldn't believe that it suited her. She thought: "Everybody will know I'm wearing Susan's blue silk." Philip's long, considering look told her that he knew. All the same she prepared herself to enjoy the party.

Susan had told her that a great many distinguished people would be coming and that the talk would be good. Matty longed for the brilliance that would soon break round her. After being cut off for nearly thirty years she came back to it again eager and excited. They were all there, all those people that Susan had

promised her she should see: Lawrence Stephen, who was so many things—poet, playwright, novelist, and essayist; Morton Ellis, the young poet; Austin Mitchell, the young painter, their host; Paul Monier-Owen, the young sculptor; Rowland Whitfield, the philosopher; and Michael Harrison, the youngest poet, who was beginning to be talked about that year, though his poems existed as yet only in manuscript and were not known outside the group. Matty didn't know that these young men regarded Philip Attwater as a paralytic figure of the past, and his wife Susan as a nonentity. To Matty, Philip, with his distinguished, authoritative air, seemed to dominate the group; as for Susan, she had lost all her old slowness and stiffness, her body and mind moved alertly; you could see by the intelligent shining of her eyes that she followed every point in a conversation where Matty, with her head going round and round, looking for a clue, was lost.

The talk to-night was about something that they called Cubism and something they called Vorticism, and, for the life of her, Matty couldn't tell what Cubism and Vorticism were. They seemed to have something to do with art.

"But what *is* Vorticism," she asked Philip.

Philip shrugged his shoulders.

"Ask Morton Ellis. Morton, Mrs. Crawford wants to know what Vorticism is."

Morton Ellis looked at Matty as if she amused him very much, and began:

"Vorticism is the principle of movement applied to the arts."

"You mean," said Philip, "it's the principle of violence done to all art."

"I mean precisely what I say. Movement applied to the arts. It means the introduction of the element of time."

"Time?" said Matty, trying hard to understand.

"Time. Time enters into all movement. That means that instead of being static any longer art has become dynamic."

"Dynamic?" She could do nothing but repeat, idiotically, the bewildering word.

"It expresses energy. In a painting by Mitchell or a figure of Monier-Owen, you get real movement through successive planes. That is done by breaking up figures and projecting their parts on to different planes, so as to give the effect of successive moments. Can't you see violent movement in that frieze of Mitchell's over the chimney-piece?"

Matty stared, but she could see nothing but broken shafts, pierced by triangular wedges, lines cut by half circles, half circles cut by lines, a thing like a pair of red and white bathing drawers, and a thing like a blue and bronze striped handkerchief struggling with the map of Ireland, and it seemed to her that the man who had painted it must be mad.

"I see nothing but confusion," said Matty.

"What you ought to see is a quick march of forms through innumerable planes, abstract energies unloosed, continuous movement."

"But, Austin," said Susan in a sweet voice, "you say it's all movement, but there was movement in the

old painting. Take Botticelli's Spring or any battlepiece. There's movement in the frieze of the Parthenon."

"No, Susan, there's no movement in Botticelli's Spring, or in any battlepiece or in the frieze of the Parthenon; there's nothing but arrested movement, not movement going on. You cannot get movement going on as long as you paint figures intact; you get nothing but position in space at one instant of time. To get movement through space at many instants of time you must decompose your figures and project their lines through different planes, every one of which stands for an instant of time. That is why the lines of Monier-Owen's Dancers are distorted. You see what I mean, Mrs. Crawford?"

Matty didn't see. Her head continued to go round and round, worse than ever. She felt as if she was lost in some desert of dry, whirling, scintillating sand where there was no path nor any landmark that she knew. And Susan kept on looking at her with that intolerably bright expression, as if she invited her to join in.

"Perhaps," said Mitchell kindly, "you are looking for a sensuous representation. What we are trying to give you is not the sensuous representation, but the pure abstract intellectual form of things."

"I see," said Susan brightly. And Matty wondered whether she really did see. It was incredible. And yet Susan seemed to have sharpened her mind on Philip's for so long that it had now an edge like a razor.

"My trouble is," said Susan, "that cubist lines seem

to begin nowhere and lead nowhere. The patterns are unfinished."

"They lead," said Mitchell, "into the fourth dimension, the pattern is finished there."

"But," said Susan, "all patterns are finished in the fourth dimension."

"Properly speaking, the pattern is never finished at all, since there are an infinite number of dimensions; the utmost we can do is to suggest them as continued in an unknown direction. Now the art of the past has none of this suggestion of infinity. Every object is presented as bounded by its lines and finished within them. Even impressionism bounds its objects with air. But what is an object that you represent that way? It's nothing but an arbitrary selection. I can take that chair as an object in itself, torn from its context, an island with air all round it, or I can take it as part of the bookcase it stands against, in which case its lines will both intersect and be prolonged in the lines of the bookcase, and I can continue this process so as to include the plane of the wall and the angle of the wall and ceiling, and their lines in perspective, or I can take all the planes of this room as drawn through each other and thus translate the movement of my eye in travelling from one to the other."

"Dear me, fancy translating the movement of your eye," said Matty, and caught Susan looking at her. Susan's eyes were critical; they said plainly, "Really, my dear, if you can't say anything more intelligent than that you'd better not say anything at all." And Matty wished that she hadn't said anything at all. Morton

Ellis smiled at her kindly, and she thought: "Perhaps he didn't expect me to understand him. Perhaps he'd have been annoyed if I had understood him. It's not as if I were somebody who mattered."

No, she didn't matter. In this brilliant circle, where thought was a game, where men and women only counted so far as they had something to contribute towards the intellectual entertainment of the rest, Matty was nobody. She could neither give, nor could she receive intelligently. She sat, not listening now, while Morton Ellis and Austin Mitchell went on, looking straight before her, idiotically blank. She felt that she must be looking idiotically blank. There wasn't a thought in her mind or anything that could be called a thought. Then Susan took pity on her and removed her to where Philip sat talking to Rowland Whitfield, the philosopher.

"You'd like to hear what Philip is saying, wouldn't you, dear?" said Susan kindly.

"Oh, I should," said Matty fervently. She used to understand what Philip said; he was always beautifully clear. It was kind of Susan to bring her to Philip; still, she knew, as well as if Susan had told her, that she was being taken from Austin Mitchell and Morton Ellis to prevent her exposing herself any further in that quarter.

"If you ask me, Bergson's theory of time is all tosh," Philip was saying. "According to Bergson the time of succession, the time things happen in, is simply space."

"But we measure the time of succession spatially, by the hands on the clock, the shadow on the dial, the

falling sand in the glass. I take it that what can be measured spatially is spatial."

"I don't," said Philip. "The space quantum and the time quantum are qualitively different."

"This," thought Matty, "is worse than anything Mr. Ellis or Mr. Mitchell said. Oh, dear, what shall I *do* if he goes on like that?"

"But," said the philosopher, "all our concepts of time are spatial. We talk about time passing and time standing still, about being in time and out of time, about co-existence, which is juxtaposition in time."

"Then," said Philip, "if I beat time I'm really beating space. Co-existence in space is co-existence in different spaces at the same time."

"And that is co-existence in time."

"Yes, but the time is the same and the spaces are different."

"From each other," the philosopher said, "but not from time which covers them all. Time is stuffing for the gaps in space."

"And how," said Philip, "about the gaps in time?"

"Space stuffs them by enduring through all instants."

"But the whole point about space is that two things can't occupy the same space while they can occupy the same time. That, I say, is an essential difference."

"Yet we talk about position in time and position in space. And what do you make of time as the fourth dimension?"

"I don't make anything of it. Time isn't a dimension of space."

"And yet it can enter the same system of co-ordinates. And that, *I* say, is an essential sameness."

Matty thought: "Oh, will they never have done?" She sat silent while the dry, scintillating sand whirled pitilessly about her head.

Then Susan, kind Susan, came for her. They were going.

"Did you enjoy your talk with Philip, Matty?" she said, on the way home.

"I didn't talk. He and the philosopher man talked, I listened."

"Well, did you enjoy listening?"

"I would have if I'd understood it. But I didn't understand a word. Not one word."

"And yet," Susan said, "Philip is so very clear. And Professor Whitfield is very clear."

"It's my head that wasn't," Matty said.

"Poor Matty," said Philip, "it was a little unkind of us to give you such a dose of space and time."

"Space and time," said Matty, "are all very well in their way. When you take them separately."

"Professor Whitfield would say you mustn't take them separately."

"Well, it's when you mix them that I'm done for."

"Dear Matty," said Susan smoothly. And it was as if she had said, "Don't mind being stupid. We didn't expect you to be as clever as we are."

"Well, but Susan, did *you* understand all that Mr. Ellis and Mr. Mitchell were saying about movements and projections and the fourth dimension?"

"Yes," said Susan, "I think I did. You see, I'm used to it. You'd have understood it once, Matty."

"You mean it comes of living nearly thirty years in Wyck."

"I think it does. Is it thirty years, dear?"

Matty meditated. And then an invincible curiosity overcame her. "Susan, what is the Fourth Dimension?"

"Ask Philip."

"Philip, what is it?"

Philip was silent. In the dark she could feel him smiling his rather cruel smile.

"Can't you tell me?"

"Yes, I could tell you, Matty, but I don't think you'd like it if I did."

She thought: "They don't even think I'm worth explaining things to." But she persisted. "Tell me."

"Well, it's an unknown direction."

"That seems to me where we've all been going tonight."

And Philip said again, "Poor Matty."

And she felt again, as she had felt with Milly, that she wasn't wanted. She was out of it, out of touch with their shining intellectual life and with the very memory of that life; all that wonderful talk going over her head like sand. She could see that Susan, with her brain sharpened by living thirty years with Philip, had no patience with her stupidity; she had ceased for Susan to be anybody who counted. She was nothing but a dull little parson's wife up from the country, with all her provincial ignorance about her. She should never

have attempted to mix with the wonderful, clever people, to listen to their talk. She should have stayed at home, never come to London at all. Nobody wanted her, not Milly, not Philip or Susan. She was in their way; they were looking forward to the day when she would go.

Well, she would get away from it all, the day after to-morrow, away from the whirling talk, the bewildering intellectual light, back to Wyck-on-the-Hill, and to John. Dear Wyck. Darling John. She hungered and thirsted for their peace, their quietness, as she had hungered and thirsted for the Attwaters' parties and for the streaming of the intellectual light. To be back in the place she belonged to, the place where she was wanted.

John met her at the station. Tears came to her eyes when she saw him, with his stooping shoulders, his grey hair, his kind, wrinkled face, the high waistcoat and little round hat.

She was glad to be going up the long hill road with its dim green light under the over-arching trees, past the graveyard at the top with the pointed cones of its yews, to see the Unicorn Inn at the corner looking down the road home. And her own dear grey house with the welcoming windows and Derry standing on the doorstep.

In the drawing-room she turned to John and put her arms around him.

"Oh, John darling, I'm so glad to get back to you. I wish I'd never gone."

"Why, didn't you enjoy it?"

"Yes, it was nice seeing Milly and Mother and Father."

"Weren't the Attwaters nice?"

"Very nice. Very kind. Only they were all so clever and I'm so stupid and I wanted you. And it's good to be home again."

XVI

Mr. Parker, the vicar of Lower Speed, had called. He was a man of seventy-five with a mild pink face, white hair and beard, pale-blue eyes, and an expression of mingled benevolence and agitation as if life bewildered and dismayed him. He was one of the few brother clergymen for whom John had any affection and respect. He had been talking for some time. John, Matty and Millicent listened. Milly had come down for a short holiday in the September following Matty's visit to London.

"Yes," said Mr. Parker, "I can remember what Wyck was like thirty years ago. It was the worst parish in the county. Rough and disorderly, continual drunkenness and foul language, quarrelling and fighting in the streets, the children brought up like little hooligans. And now all that has ceased; there isn't a quieter, better-behaved village in the Kingdom. You've done a great work in Wyck, Crawford."

Milly looked up. She hadn't expected this.

"I?" said John.

"Yes, you. Nearly thirty years of patient, untiring, uphill work, and you have your reward. It isn't given to all of us to see our labour succeed like that in our lifetime."

"You think I've succeeded?"

"I most certainly do. You've only to look back

thirty years to see what you've done. You had the most terrible and difficult task, and I know no one who could have carried it out so well. You've civilised the place; I should say Christianised it."

"And I thought I had failed. I've been heartbroken over my failure. I see men I thought I had reclaimed falling back into drunkenness and sin, children that I've watched over growing up and going to the bad, people I had reconciled quarrelling again, till I've asked myself if it was any good going on. I have been in despair and you tell me I've succeeded."

"Yes, you've looked too close, you've only seen the few cases you've failed to win; you haven't seen the thing in its right perspective, or you'd know what you've done."

"No. It doesn't seem to me that I've done anything at all."

"Oh, Father, you know how you've worked."

"Surely," said Mr. Parker, "you can see the difference between Wyck as it is to-day and Wyck as it was when you first came into it."

"Yes, there *is* a difference, but I cannot put it down to my own efforts."

"And I put it down to nothing but your efforts, under God."

"No, Wyck has simply been drawn into the stream of humanity's inborn tendency to rise."

"It was you who drew it in. I've watched you very closely, and I've wondered at the work you've done, you and Mrs. Crawford."

"Yes, Matty has worked as hard as I; harder, some-

times. But you should hear Edward Farrar. He'd tell you that the Cotswold villagers are incorrigible, and that you can work yourself into your grave before you make any impression on them."

"Edward Farrar, yes. That's his experience, no doubt, but it isn't yours. You know it isn't. The people don't like Edward Farrar. There's no warmth of human kindness in the man. 'If a man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how shall he love God whom he hath not seen?' I doubt if Edward Farrar loves God."

"We must not judge him. Nobody can say what goes on inside him. Perhaps he doesn't know himself. He has an unfortunate manner."

"He has certainly mistaken his vocation. Well, I wish I had your record, Crawford."

"It's nothing. If I've won over one single human soul it would be worth all the years of my ministry. Only one."

"And you've won many, many more than you think. I tell you you've been the salvation of Wyck."

The old man rose.

"If you only knew what your example has meant to me. When I've been despondent I've thought of what you have accomplished and taken heart again. You've shown me what ought to be done and can be done. I wanted to tell you——"

He said good-bye. John went with him to the garden gate.

"Milly," said her mother, "when Father comes back, say something nice to him."

He came back very thoughtful.

"He has made me ashamed," he said.

"He should have made you proud," said Matty.

"Yes, Daddy, it's true, every word of it. *I'm* proud of you."

"Oh, my dear child."

"Ever so proud. Wyck may be a little place, but it was a great thing to have turned it from what it was to what it is. You mustn't worry about the people you can't get at. Think of all the others: the people you've kept out of the public-houses, the boys and girls you've taught and trained. You're too near it to see it as clearly as I can. I can appreciate it because on a small scale it's the same thing that I'm doing myself and if I can make an impression on Poplar and Limehouse——"

"You're very good to me, my dear," said John. He said it without irony. He did really believe that Milly was very good to him. "I shouldn't dream of comparing my work with yours."

"Oh, but you may, Daddy. It's the same work and you've done it beautifully."

"Yes, Milly," said her mother, "that's the word for it. Beautifully. But your father *is* beautiful."

"I know he is, Mummy. Don't you know I know?"

It was Derek who kept his father so humble and so despairing. Here, in his own house, was the proof of his failure. Derek had been drinking again. He borrowed money from his friends and spent it at the Three Magpies. Always, after every outbreak he was sorry. He swore that it should never happen again.

And it happened the next day and the next. The bouts of drinking lasted for weeks on end. John and Matty had come to look on his drunkenness as a disease, a thing that Derek was no longer responsible for. And the problem of Derek was insoluble. It was bad for him living at home and doing nothing, but it had been worse when he worked, for then he had had more money to spend on drink. Hitherto the only way to control him had been to cut off his supplies. But now Derek had found means of getting money. Not as much money as he had earned; he could only borrow a pound from one friend and a few shillings—he had sunk to shillings—from another at a time; but it was enough to get drunk on now and then.

Matty was ill with the anxiety of him. For a long time she had been subject to fainting fits, and they came more often now. The doctor said she had a weak heart and must be spared all fatigue and all worry. But Matty fretted and her heart got weaker.

And now for the first time Milly knew. She had seen Derek drunk. And Milly could neither understand nor forgive him. She wouldn't believe he wasn't responsible.

"He could stop if he chose," she said. "He ought to be made to control himself."

"Who is to make him?" her father asked.

"You ought, Daddy."

"My dear, I've done all I know—all I don't know. I've kept him short of money so that he shouldn't spend it on drink. And now he borrows it; I don't know who from, or I'd stop that too."

"You should have controlled him long ago, before he got the upper hand."

"It's no use telling me what we should have done long ago. He was brought up as you were, Milly."

"He was allowed to do as he liked much more."

"Milly dear," said her mother, "that isn't true. You're mistaken. You've forgotten. We were not more strict with you than we were with Derek. Derek's different from you, that's all."

"You've never known, my child, what it is to be seized by an overwhelming temptation," said her father. "Derry's sin is stronger than he is."

"Oh, if you make him out not responsible."

"God is the judge of his responsibility, not I."

Milly lifted her chin with her little righteous air. She was determined to speak to her brother.

She found him one morning, after a night of drunkenness, alone in the dining-room.

"Derek," she said, "you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Why?"

"You were disgracefully tipsy last night. Don't you know you were tipsy?"

"If I was it's none of your business."

"It's my business if Mother and Father are made miserable. They're *my* father and mother and I happen to care for them."

"A lot you care. You never come near them if you can help it."

"The work keeps me away. You know that, Derry."

"I know you've made them ten times more miserable than I have."

"I? How have I made them miserable?"

"By leaving them. I'd never have left them so long as they wanted me here. But the fact is, you're bored to death in this beastly hole; so am I. You get out of it and work, and I stay in it and drink; that's all the difference there is between us. You work to please yourself and I drink to please myself. Only you don't care a damn whether you hurt them or not, and I do."

"If you cared you'd leave off drinking."

"If you cared you'd leave off working. But you're beastly selfish. That's what's the matter with you."

"I give up my life to helping other people, if that's being selfish."

"It is, when you're thinking of yourself all the time. I know you, Milly. You never did a thing in your life that wasn't for yourself. You go about admiring yourself and thinking how good and wonderful you are, and you expect us to do the same. Mother and Father may be taken in by you, not me."

"At any rate I work. You do nothing but hang about and drink. You've no business to be living on Father, when he can't afford it."

"You're living on him, too. If you're so anxious about Father, why don't you turn out and earn something?"

"That comes well from you."

"It doesn't matter who it comes from. It's the truth."

"Father wouldn't like me to leave my work. There's nothing in this world that I can do so well, and there's nobody that can do it better. It's what I've got to do. I don't cost Father much more than if I were at home. He feels that he's helping on the work when he leaves me free to do it. But you, you're doing nothing to justify your existence. I'd sooner be dead than live like you. It would be disgraceful even if you didn't drink."

"If I could find something to do to-morrow I'd do it. What is there to do here?"

"If there's nothing here, go away and find something."

"Father wants me here. He thinks he's looking after me. He thinks I'd drink worse if I went away. So I should."

"Can't you exercise *any* self-control?"

"Of course I can if I choose. But I don't choose."

"Then it's all the more shame for you."

"And all the more glory to you. If I didn't loaf and drink you couldn't come and talk to me and feel superior."

"You *are* a brute, Derry."

"I daresay I am. But I won't be talked to. Not by you. I'll take it from Father and I'll take it from Mother. They've a right to pitch into me. But I won't take it from you."

"Well, if it's any satisfaction to you, you're killing Mother."

"Damn you. Leave me alone."

Milly left him.

That evening, while Derek was in the village drinking, Milly talked to her father and mother.

"Father, Derek says you want to keep him in Wyck. Do you?"

"I'm afraid to let him go."

"But don't you think it's bad for him doing nothing?"

"Very bad. Nothing worse. I don't know what to do about him, Milly."

"I do. I should send him out to Canada to farm. Send him somewhere so far from any town that he can't get drink."

"He'd have money to spend and he'd get drink somehow."

"Not very often. Not as often as he gets it here. And if he must drink, it's better he should do it somewhere else."

"I don't think so. If he must drink it's better he should do it here where I can look after him."

"You've looked after him enough. And what good has it done him?"

"It's made him sorry and ashamed."

"What's the good of his being sorry and ashamed if it doesn't make him stop?"

"Do you really think, Milly, he'd do better away?"

"I do. He can't do worse. It's just possible strangers would have more influence over him. He'd be safe on a farm miles from any town. Safer than he is here."

"Well, but dear, Derry doesn't know anything about farming," said Matty.

"I don't like to send him to an uncertainty," said John.

"He can learn. I tell you what you must do. You must send him to Burton to be trained. Then you'll know if he's any good. You won't be sending him to an uncertainty."

"Would Burton take him, though?"

"He would if you paid him. It would be worth it."

"And would Derry go?"

"He must go. But I believe he would. He said he'd do anything."

"I'll think it over."

John thought it over, and at the end of his thinking he went to Farmer Burton and told him he was going to send his son out to Canada to farm.

"Ay," said Farmer Burton, "I've a brother out in Australia. Got a big sheep farm."

"Sheep farming would be the very thing."

"Ay, if a man knows suthin about sheep."

It was then that John asked Farmer Burton if he would take his son and teach him farming.

Farmer Burton looked dubious; it was clear that he didn't care for the job.

"I dunno as I can," he said. "I've got my own work to do without teaching."

John introduced delicately the subject of remuneration.

"Ay," said Farmer Burton, "but I dunno as I'd 'ave the time to larn en."

"You could put him to any odd job about the farm. That would be part of his training. And for the rest he could just go round with you and the men and see what's doing. He'd learn a lot that way. I'd send

him to Cirencester only I want to have him under my own eye till he's ready to go abroad."

"Ay, I understand. But I should 'ave to larn en special."

He looked at the rector's worried, anxious face and half relented.

"Well," he said, "I don't say as I will, and I don't say as I won't. I'll 'ave a talk with the missus and let you know."

A weak later John met Burton riding through the Market Square. The farmer reined in his horse.

"How do you do, Mr. Crawford? About your son, now. I've 'ad a talk with the missus and I've been turning it over in my mind. The way we look at it is this. You've been a good friend to us and we should like to oblige you all we can. I'll take your son for a month. If 'e does well I'll keep en and train en, if 'e doesn't I must send en back to 'ee. But I'll give en a fair trial.

"Thank you, Burton, I shall not forget it. Now as to terms, what would you require?"

"I'll leave that to you, Mr. Crawford."

"Would thirty shillings a week be enough?"

"Ay, more than enough. Too much. I'll take en for a pound a week, if so be as he boards at 'ome."

"You can find time for him?"

"I must make time. I'm short of a hand and he may be useful if he's not afraid of hard work."

"I don't think he'll be afraid."

He had still to tell Derek. He called him into the study after tea.

"Derek," he said, "I've been thinking about you."

"I'm afraid," said Derek, "I give you a lot to think about."

"You do. You know, my boy, you can't go on like this for ever, doing nothing. It's bad for you."

"I know. But what the dickens can I do? They won't take me back at the bank. I'd do anything if I only knew what."

"Would you like to take up farming?"

"I don't know anything about it."

"You could learn. I was speaking about it to Burton the other day; and if you'll go to him he's agreed to teach you. You could work on his farm for six months or a year, and then I'd send you out to Canada or Australia. You'd have to go somewhere away from a town, where you'd be out of the reach of temptation. Would you go?"

"I'll go anywhere and do anything. I don't want to stick here being a nuisance. I don't say I'll keep off the drink if I can get it, but I'll go somewhere where I can't get it. There must be lots of places in Canada and Australia."

"And you'll go to Burton at once?"

"Yes, if you want me to. I say, have you got to pay him?"

"Yes, I've got to pay. But it'll be worth it if you turn to and learn."

"I'll learn all right. I've sometimes thought I'd like to take up farming. I say, Daddy, it's jolly decent of you."

"You'll have to work hard, Derry; you'll have to begin at the beginning, follow the plough and clean the pig-sties. It won't do to be particular."

"Oh, I'm not particular. I daresay cleaning pig-sties is all I'm fit for."

"Well, if you go at once you'll be just in time to help with the harvest. I ought to tell you that Burton won't keep you if you don't do well. You're to try it for a month and see. So mind you do your best."

"You needn't worry about that. I say, I'm beastly sorry for all I've done. I'll try not to get drunk while I'm with Burton."

"That's right," said John, "you can keep off it if you try hard enough."

And the next day Derek went to Burton's farm. He worked with such a good will over the harvest that Burton was pleased with him and said he shaped well. He wasn't afraid of hard work and he wasn't particular. He cleaned out the cow-sheds, the stables and the pig-sties; he waded in the liquid manure of the farmyards; he walked at the plough tail and learned how to drive a straight furrow. He drove the harrow. He smelt the good smell of the freshly-turned earth. He helped with the threshing; he breathed in the thick whirling dust from the thresher; he hoed turnips; he milked the cows and fed them; he fed the horses, the pigs and the poultry.

Autumn and winter passed and Derek was still at the farm. For three months he remained miraculously sober, then came a brief outburst, followed by another period of sobriety. Earth and sky were good to him;

he had grown stronger for his days spent, wet or fine, in the keen, open air.

And now in the early spring he followed the shepherd and learned from him how to look after the sheep and the lambs. This was the work he liked best of all. Then came sowing time; Derek drove the sowing machines over the pinkish-brown ploughed lands. Then summer and the haying; Derek drove the mowing machine and the tosser; he pitched hay for hours together. And Farmer Burton came to John and told him that he had taught his son all that there was to learn. "You're right, Mr. Crawford, in making a farmer of en. 'E's done famous. Famous 'e's done. A wonderful way with the dumb beasts 'e 'as. I'd trust en with my sheep and my lambs any day. I would."

And in that summer of 1913 Farmer Burton's brother James came over from Australia on a visit. He saw Derek working and took a fancy to him, and one day he called at the Rectory and asked to see the rector. They had a long talk, and in the end it was settled that Derek should go to Australia with James Burton in the early autumn. John had told him about Derek's failing, and asked him if he cared to take the risk?

"There'll not be much risk where I shall take him. We're all teetotalers at my place and it's forty miles from the nearest town. If he gets off and bursts out once in a way it'll be the worst 'e can do, and it's no worse than some fellows do anyway. He's a grand worker, your son."

"If you can keep him sober."

"Oh, I'll keep 'im, don't you fear. I shan't stand no

nonsense. 'E'll be safer with me than he would be with most of them."

"And you can send him back again if it doesn't answer," said John.

Millicent was home for the late summer holiday. John and Matty told her how wise she had been.

"I'm thankful," said John, "that I took your advice, my dear. This will be the beginning of a new life for Derry."

"Let's hope so," said Millicent. "Anyhow, if he drinks you won't see him. Anything's better than his doing it here."

"I don't agree with you," said John. "I'm hoping that he won't do it out there."

Derek talked to his sister one day when he came on her alone.

"So this was your idea, was it?" he said.

"It was."

"Well, it isn't a bad one. Only don't you get it into your head that it's going to do the trick. If I get a chance of drinking out there I'll drink. The only thing is that I shan't get much of a chance. Not often enough to matter. If they want to get rid of me it's about the best thing they can do, poor things."

"But, oh, Derry, you will try and keep straight, after all they've done for you."

"I'll try. And I daresay I shall, for a good bit at a time anyhow. I know I'm a rotter. But I shouldn't have been so bad if Mother and Father hadn't been so good. All you people are so damned good. A fellow hasn't a chance with you. I wonder what Father

would say if I told him his goodness had driven me to drink."

"Oh, yes, blame everybody but yourself. Say it's my fault and Father's and Mother's."

"Well, so it is. You're so good that it's no use my trying to compete. I can't live up to it, that's all."

"You'd have done better, wouldn't you, if I'd set you a bad example?"

"Well, when I was a kid I made up my mind, whatever I was, I wouldn't be like you. If you were good I'd be the other thing. Anyhow, don't go off with the idea that you've saved me."

"If you're determined not to be saved."

"I'm determined not to have any damned nonsense. I'll do my damnedest, but I can't promise to do more."

That was all she could get out of him.

And the day came when Derek had to go.

Tears came into his eyes when he saw his mother crying.

"Mother," he said, "I'm sorry I've been such a nuisance. I swear I'll try and keep off the drink. I wish I hadn't been such a brute to Milly. I don't know how it is, but when she talks to me there's a devil in me that gets up and wants to hurt her."

She's forgiven you, Derry. She's too good to remember it."

"Yes, she's good, and I told her she wasn't."

"There she is. Tell him you've forgiven him, Milly."

"Of course I've forgiven him."

"Well, good-bye, Mother."

She clung to him, crying, and he pressed her to his heart, putting his hand on her head and kissing her wet face.

"Don't cry, Mother, I can't bear it. Good-bye."

"Good-bye and God bless and keep you."

John and Millicent went with him to the station. Matty stood in the doorway of the house, watching the cab go slowly up the hill. When it disappeared she turned into the house and went upstairs to her room, sobbing and pressing her hand tight to her heart.

She wondered: Had they indeed done the thing that was best for Derek, or only the thing that was easiest for themselves? Had they opened up a new life for him, or had they put him away because he was their shame, to drink himself to death out of their sight?

No. No. John had wanted him to go to Australia, and everything John did was good and wise. His motives would be pure.

When John came back he comforted her.

XVII

Derek had been gone ten months when, in the beginning of August, nineteen fourteen, there came the Great War. There were people in Wyck who stuck to it that England would not be drawn in, for the reason that they did not wish England to be drawn in. In a few days the news of the ultimatum shattered their comfort and their peace. The poor people received it with a certain apathy. Germans and French and Belgians were all one to them. But in the Rectory and the houses of the tradespeople and among the Corbetts and Fieldings, the Waddingtons, the Markhams and Hawtreys, there was dismay.

Captain Markham, General Markham's son, rejoined his regiment suddenly. This was the first intimation that England might be drawn in. General Markham had no doubt as to the issue. The war, he said, would only last four months and the Allies would win all along the line.

"I don't see the Kaiser's army holding up British forces longer than four months," said General Markham.

John shook his head.

"I'm afraid," he said, "it may last as many years. It's going to be a frightful business. We are totally unprepared."

"Unprepared? What do you mean? Unprepared?"

"We haven't the munitions and we haven't the men."

"I'd back the men we have got against all the troops the Kaiser can put in the field."

"I don't say that God is on the side of the big battalions, but I do say he helps those who help themselves. Not people who find themselves landed in a big war without munitions."

"If we haven't munitions we can make 'em. And who's talking of a big war?"

"I am," said John.

"I am not," said General Markham. "I see no big war. I see nothing but a big fight. When the British Expeditionary Force gets over there it'll sweep the Germans out of Belgium. Sweep 'em out."

"If we send enough men. But we never send enough. And we're always just too late. Not in the end, perhaps, but in the beginning. And between this and then——"

"Between this and then there'll be four months' fighting. That's all there'll be."

"John, do you think we shall be beaten?" said Matty.

"In the beginning probably. There'll be defeat after defeat. But we shall muddle through somehow. We always have muddled through. Or we might be beaten on the land and victorious by sea. The Navy's all right."

"And I can tell you, Crawford, the British Army's all right, too."

"I never said it wasn't. It's superb. Only there isn't enough of it."

"It's quality, not quantity that tells," said General Markham. "Are you going to preach defeat?"

"I am not. I'm going to preach victory. I cannot see the British ultimately defeated any more than you can."

"Thank you, sir."

"But it's going to be a long war and a frightful one."

"Oh, John, how long?"

"I don't know how long."

"Of course he doesn't know. Don't you listen to him, Mrs. Crawford. He isn't a soldier. And look here, Crawford, if you go about croaking there'll be trouble between you and me."

"John wouldn't *croak*, if he thought we were going to be beaten to-morrow," said Matty.

"Well, he sounds like it," said the General, and he got up and went away.

"God help us," said John, "if all the Generals are like him."

"He's a soldier," said Matty.

"That's why," said John.

And the Germans stormed through Belgium. Liège fell, and Namur, and the British retreated from Mons; Antwerp fell, and there came the Great Retreat. Paris was threatened. It took all John's faith in God to believe in ultimate victory. Day after day, he and Matty waited desperately for news. Matty, who had once looked on the reading of the morning paper as a tiresome duty, watched for the moment when *The Times* would be dropped on the threshold of the house. She and John read together of disaster after disaster; they

read the long lists of the killed and wounded. They went about pretending that their hearts were not heavy and that all would yet be well.

And the men of Wyck began to go out to the war: first Captain Markham, then the three Fielding boys, and young Hawtrey; then the tradespeople—Scarrott, the butcher, and the two young grocers, Wilkins and Blake; and from the cottages young Ballingers and Mabbitts and Trinders and Hintons, and Bill Jakes's youngest. A room in the Town Hall was set apart for war-work, and there Matty and the district visitors and the wives and daughters of the tradespeople and farmers sat for hours making bandages and surgical swabs, while all that was left of the wood-carving class turned out crutches and splints.

And while John and Matty in little Wyck worked and agonised, up in London Philip Attwater was making himself unpopular by his Pacifism. He went about to the workmen's clubs and unions preaching Pacifism, he called it "making the conscientious objector articulate." He spent his days writing mildly seditious pamphlets, and lived in the glorious expectation of imprisonment that never came.

And from his pulpit in Wyck, John preached the war and the righteousness of England's part in it, and exhorted his parishioners to faith and endurance and the hope of victory.

"I loathe war as much as you do," he wrote to Philip. "If I could stop it, honourably, this minute I would. Who wouldn't? But this war can't be stopped honourably. It's got to be fought to a finish, and we shan't

win it if we don't all put our backs into it. I think your conduct is courageous but criminal."

And Philip wrote back violent letters, abusing John. "You're safe enough in your pulpit," he said.

"If he knew," said John, "how I loathe my safety. If I were a young man I'd fling up my living and go into the Army."

His safety was agony to him.

But when he thought of Derek, safe in Australia, he was glad.

"Thank God, he's out of it," he said.

One morning, at the end of October, a telegram came.

"Coming home. Arrive to-day, 5:15. Derek."

"Oh, John," Matty said, "what can have happened?"

John's face was grave. He did not answer.

Matty burst into tears.

"I'm frightened, John. I wish—I wish he wasn't coming. I don't feel as if I could go through it again."

"You mayn't have to go through it."

"We shall. We shall. He must have lost his job again."

"I don't think so."

"Why should he come? When he was getting on so well?"

"Because—Matty, I think he's come over to fight."

"To fight?"

"Yes. It's what he would do. He's just thrown everything up and come."

"You think it's that?"

"I can't think anything else. You ought to be glad to see him, Matty."

"I am. I am. If only he'll keep straight."

"You must believe that he will."

"It's awful of me to be so afraid. I'll try not to be."

But, try as she would, she could not still that pang of misgiving; she could not share John's faith. She had suffered and seen John suffer too much through Derek not to dread his return. She saw in it the renewal of their suffering. And it was as if she had wished never to see her son again. And with her pang of dread there came the sharper pang of remorse. It was awful of her to be so afraid of him, not to be glad that he had come. Supposing John was right, and he had come over to enlist. But she was not sure that he had come for that. Well, they would soon know what he had come for.

Derek had come. And with his arms tight round her and his face pressed to hers, Matty's pang of fear and her doubt went from her. He was her son, her son, and he had come back to her.

"Derry, my own Derry."

"Forgive me," he said, "for coming. It's all right, Mummy."

It was as if he knew what had been in her mind. "You're wondering what on earth I've come for. But it's all right, really it is. You see, there's a war on and I couldn't keep out of it, I couldn't really. I had to come back, to fight."

He held her off with his arms and looked at her, searching her eyes for the truth.

"You wouldn't rather I'd kept away?"

"No, darling, I'm so glad you've come. So very glad."

"I knew that was what you'd come for," said John.

"Did you? I'm glad you knew."

Matty thought: "If only I could say that I had known."

"Of course," he went on, "it does seem rather rotten to go and fling everything up when I was doing so awfully well. But I couldn't stick there, all safe, when everybody here was going out. I simply couldn't."

"I know you couldn't, dear boy. We liked to think of you, safe out there, but I'm not sure that I don't like this better."

"My job'll be all right. Burton said so. It'll be ready for me when I come back."

"I know," he said, "you'd be afraid if you thought I'd lost it."

"No, Derry, I shouldn't be afraid, even then. You've done the right thing, and I'm proud of you."

"Wait till you see whether I funk or not."

"You'll never funk. Never."

"Oh, you don't know. I might. Lots of fellows do."

"You never will," said his mother. She was glad to declare her belief in his courage.

Derek stayed at home three days. Then he enlisted in the —th Gloucestershires, and went into training on Salisbury Plain.

"Dearest Father:

"You must be wondering how I'm getting on. Well, our quarters are rotten, and the food's rotten, and

there's a lot of sickness in camp. But it isn't half as beastly as I thought it would be, and I've kept splendidly fit so far. I eat tons of food and I don't drink, don't want to, so you needn't worry about me. I think I can keep it up. The discipline does a lot for you; you get into a groove and stick there. The fact is, I did a jolly good thing for myself when I went farming, or perhaps I should say you did a jolly good thing for me when you made me go. I got hardened. I was in first-rate condition when I started to train, so I've got the pull over some of the fellows who've had to get their fat down first thing. Anyhow, it isn't as hard on me as it is on lots of them who come straight out of comfy homes. And after mixing with farm hands for ages I'm not afraid of my company like some of the softer chaps. Of course there are all sorts here, pretty rough specimens some of them, and things happen that fastidious persons would mind frightfully. But I'm not fastidious, and I don't turn a hair. And the discipline comes easy after being used to taking orders from old man Burton. I haven't called my soul my own for long enough, and now it doesn't care a cuss what I call it. So thank God for farming.

"Your loving

"Derek.

"P. S.—I don't want to swank, but I know you'd like to hear that I'm first in drill, and first in musketry, and first in bombing. First in everything. So I'm hoping I'll get out to the front after four months' training instead of six."

"France,
"June 9th, 1915.

"DEAREST FATHER:

"Here I am. I mayn't tell you where. Anyhow, I've been in the front-line trenches for four days and now I'm behind the lines again. Expect to be back in the trenches any day. No, I haven't been over the top yet. I promise I'll tell you when I've been, and what it feels like if I feel anything. I can't say I like the trenches. The filth is appalling, and the smells are worse, and the row the shells make is worst of all. And the danger isn't pleasant, it's no use pretending that it is. But you get used to it. And I *want* to go over the top so as to know once for all what it's like, and whether I funk it, and to get it over. This waiting is simply beastly. I'm jolly glad I got my commission, for they say the second lieutenants go over first. But as for the chance of getting knocked out it's no more likely to be me than anybody else; less likely, for I'm not much good, and it's the best chaps that get hit. You see that every day. So tell mother she's not to worry and that I could do with some more of those tinned cutlets and that cake that Mary makes. There's a poor devil here who likes chutney with his bully beef; you might send me some.

"Your loving
"DEREK.

"P. S.—I'm beastly sorry for all the trouble I've given you. You *would* ask me if I'd kept straight, so I had to tell you about that time in camp. But it was the only time. I've been all right since I came out, and

I'll keep all right. I know when it's going to happen and when it isn't. So if you hear of me going over the top in first-class style, you needn't say to your dear old self, 'I wonder if he was drunk when he did it.' I shan't be."

Three days later John was working in his garden when the telegram came. He heard the scraping of a bicycle tyre on the gravel walk outside; at the click of the gate he looked up. He knew.

He went into the house, into the drawing-room where Matty sat sewing. At the sight of the telegram she sprang up, trembling.

"John, what is it?"

He opened the envelope and read: "Regret to inform you your son, Lieut. Derek Crawford, was killed in action, June 13th."

"Is it *bad* news, John?" His face had told her.

"The very worst."

Matty fainted.

Later, news came of the manner of Derek's death. He was leading his men on, up to the German parapet, when he fell, shot through the heart. The trench was taken.

The Colonel wrote to John: "He was the best officer I had. You could always trust him to do the right thing. He was always gay and happy whatever happened. Everybody who knew him loved him. The men adored him."

XVIII

"I COULD bear it better if I hadn't been so hard on him. I didn't want him to come back."

Matty had said it again and again. She was sitting with her hands folded in her lap, doing nothing; every now and then she raised her hand to her eyes to screen them from the light as if it hurt her.

Milly looked up. She had come down for the week-end to comfort her parents in their grief. She was busy, stitching at a frock for a poor child, so that the time she had given them should not be wasted. As she stitched she had a little air of conscious uprightness and common sense, as if she said, "Look at me, *I* am not wasting time in useless sorrow."

"It's no use going on like that, Mother. Supposing you didn't want him to come. Poor Derry hadn't done much to make you want him back."

"Don't say that, Milly," said John. He was trying to read, but he couldn't fix his mind upon his book. His mind was with Matty in her misery.

"Somebody's got to say it, with Mother working herself into a state. You didn't know, Mother, he was going to be killed."

"If only I *had* known. He came over to fight for England and I didn't know. I didn't want him back. If only I'd wanted him back."

"Mother, dear, it's very much better that Derry

should have died as he did die than that he should live as he would have lived."

"You may think that, Milly," said her father, "but it's the last thing you should say. We were all mistaken; he put us all in the wrong. We thought he would disgrace us, and he made himself glorious."

"That's what I say, it's better he should have died gloriously."

"Yes, but Milly, we should remember nothing else. . . . Well, he's safe now from our reproaches."

"If only," said Matty, "I'd wanted him back."

"You did want him back," said John.

"I didn't. I was afraid."

"Of course you were afraid," said Milly. "Anybody would have been. You didn't know, Mummy, darling."

"I should have known. You knew, John. You knew what he'd come back for."

"Yes, I knew."

"Mummy, if you'd get some sewing or something, it would be better for you than sitting there brooding over what can't be helped. *I* should be miserable if I sat doing nothing. It won't bring Derry back."

"No. Nothing will bring him back."

And Matty cried again.

And Milly stitched on; she felt herself a great beneficent power, calm and patient, looking on at the unreasonable sorrow of her parents, bearing with it. On Monday she would have gone from them, she would be back at St. Ursula's, finding her consolation in the work.

If only her mother would do something and not sit there crying. She wasn't even trying not to cry. Milly had forgotten that for three days after Derek's death Matty had not shed one tear. If she was crying now it was because she had come to life again.

Presently she rose and drew her work-basket from the cupboard, and went on with the sewing she had begun before Derek died.

"You're right, Milly. I'd better be doing something."

Milly was always right.

And as she sewed her thoughts ran on.

Before Derek died—the needle hung loose on its thread as she had dropped it when the news came of Derek's death. Henceforth all things would be dated before and after Derek's death. And whatever happened now it wouldn't matter. Nothing would matter any more. Except things that happened to John. If John were to die—she couldn't look that way. Her thoughts fell back to Derek's death. He was so young, so young to die. Only twenty-five. He had thought he would be afraid, and he was not afraid. Leading his men up to the German parapet. And the Colonel's letter. "He was always gay and happy whatever happened." She could see him, his dear blue eyes laughing, gay and happy. "Everybody who knew him loved him." Well they might, well they might. "And the men adored him." To be loved by his men, that was the greatest thing. He had led them. They must have been glad to follow him.

Her mind went back, back to the baby Derek, the

child Derek. He hadn't been a gay and happy baby. He had cried, cried; she could hear his crying now, the hopeless, helpless crying. There must have been something wrong, some nervous strain left from John's father. That would account for everything. He had been gay and happy afterwards, when he was a child, even in his naughtiness, his funny naughtiness.

And that queer time when he was fifteen, the time when he was unkind to Milly. Nerves, nerves, nerves. And so she came to his young manhood, to that dreadful Sunday evening when she and John had found him lying on the sofa. Her mind turned from that image, terrified. All that was wiped out, redeemed by Derry's death. She must think of nothing but his death. He died for England. England wanted him. He flung up everything and came. He was willing to give up his life.

"And I didn't want him to come."

Wherever she set out and by whatever road her thoughts travelled they came back to that.

She hadn't wanted him to come. She hadn't believed in him. She hadn't known, as John knew, that he was coming back to fight. She had thought shameful things of him, and all the time he had come back to die. She felt that she could have borne it, she could have borne his glorious death, if only she had believed in him then, if she had known.

On Monday Milly left them. Her last words were: "Don't fret, Mother. Think of Daddy."

And she thought of him and stopped her crying and

hid her grief away in her own heart. She went about her parish work again, still and patient. She saw her friends. And when they looked at her face there was not one of them who dared to speak to her of Derek.

Since Derek's death she and John were always together. They went together on their parish rounds; they followed each other up and down the house. If John shut himself in his study, Matty would find him there.

He would look up and say, "Is that you, darling? Come in."

"Shan't I disturb you?"

"You never disturb me."

And he would get up and settle her in the armchair with cushions at her back; he would build up the fire to keep her warm, and start again on his sermon. And Matty would sit there, quiet as a mouse, looking at him from time to time, and when she looked he knew, he was conscious of her under all his thinking, and he would turn to her and smile. That smile on his sad face wrung her heart with love and pity. His face was more worn and tired than it had been for years, and the nervous twitching had come back in it. As she watched him she could see the corner of his mouth and his eyelid go jerk, jerk; she judged that his thoughts went more slowly than they used to go, that he had difficulty in concentrating. She could see his hand, his dear patient hand, lifted, hovering over the paper, uncertain what it would write; he would look at a passage he had just written, shake his head at it, scratch it out and write it over again. This happened so many times in the

course of a sermon that John's manuscript was a jungle of erasures. And he would have to copy the whole thing out again.

"Couldn't I do that for you?" she said one day.

"What? Copy out? I wouldn't give you such a horrible task for the world, my dear."

"But I should love it."

"You couldn't read my vile handwriting. I can hardly read it myself."

"Let me see."

She came and leaned over him.

"Yes, I can."

She read: "'"If a man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" We cannot doubt that this—this thought came to St. John from Christ himself. At first sight we may think it strange that the love of man should be put, as it were, on the same level as the love of God. But we must realise that all love is one because all love is of God. The love of friends and lovers, the love of husband and wife, of parent and child—even the love of the unworthiest, in so far as it is truly love, is of God. Ay, even the love of animals for man has something divine in it. All through the teaching of Christ we shall find this further truth that love is knowledge. It is the highest knowledge. Loving is seeing. Perfect love would be perfect sight.' There, I can read it beautifully. John, how beautiful it is. I should love to write it out."

And from that moment Matty copied out all John's sermons in a large legible hand.

Once while she sat at this work he came to her and

put his hand on her shoulder, stooped over her and kissed her hair.

"You are very good to me, dear."

She looked up.

"John, it's all right as long as we have each other. Think, we've never given each other a minute's trouble from the time we married until now. I don't think you've ever said one cross word to me."

"Nor you to me. It has been very beautiful."

"Ah, *you*'ve been beautiful."

"It's your own beauty that you see in me."

He was always doing little things for her. Matty's heart kept her awake at night, beating, as she said, all ways at once. If she slept she woke early, exhausted. He would get up at five in the morning and make tea for her. She would sit up, wrapped in her vicuna shawl, leaning against the piled pillows and drink her tea while John sat at her feet and looked at her. It was John who remembered her medicine and brought it to her three times a day. He was always following her about the house with the vicuna shawl that was always slipping from her shoulders. He would wrap it round her tenderly, as a mother wraps up her baby.

"You're always fetching my tiresome shawl."

"I'm glad there is a shawl to be fetched, glad there's anything I can do for you. Are you cold, darling? Come closer to the fire."

Matty was always cold now. Her heart had been weaker since Derek's death.

Sometimes when John looked at her, he had a terrible fear. If he were to lose her——

XIX

The summer passed, and the autumn and winter. It was a cold, wet day in the February of nineteen sixteen. A grey mist of rain hung over the hills, meeting a grey fringe of rain that dipped from the ragged clouds. John had come in from a long tramp to the end of the parish, to find that old Mrs. Hinton had sent for him and Matty had gone to her in his stead.

"She oughtn't to be out a day like this, Mary," he said to the old servant.

"No, sir. That's what I told her. She was shivering with cold when she started. Shivering she was."

John went to the garden gate and looked up the hill. He stood there waiting. Presently he saw Matty coming down from the top. She came very slowly on sad, tired feet. He went to meet her; he took her umbrella and held it over her; he drew her arm in his.

"My darling, you oughtn't to be out in this weather. You'll catch your death of cold."

"I had to go, dear. Mrs. Hinton sent for you. She's very ill."

"What's the matter with her?"

"Flu."

"I wish you'd waited till I'd got in. I could have gone to her."

"It's all right. I left her settling into a doze. The

doctor's been, and she's got all she wants. You needn't go, John."

She thought: "I've saved him that, thank goodness."

"You oughtn't to have gone. I don't like you going into houses where there's flu."

"I can't stop for that. There's flu in every other house in Wyck. I mustn't give in for every little thing."

He thought, in an agony of fear: "She was tired and cold and she goes out in the rain into a house with flu."

They went into the Rectory. In the drawing-room a large fire was burning. He pulled an armchair up to the fire. He knelt down at her feet and drew off her wet shoes and stockings. He went upstairs and brought down dry stockings and her little black velvet slippers. He took her cold feet into his hands and rubbed them warm. He stooped down and kissed them.

"Dear feet. Dear blessed feet. Are they warm now?"

"Quite warm."

He drew on the dry stockings and put on her feet the little black velvet slippers. Mary came, bringing in the tea-things. John made the tea and brought it to Matty.

"I do let you wait on me, don't I?"

"I love waiting on you. You know it."

"You are good, so good to me."

And they talked. They talked of the things they would do when the war was over. They could do things now. Matty's father had died that winter and had left her a hundred a year. Many things could be done. They were rich with a hundred a year to spend.

"What a day," said Matty. "How I long, how I

long to see the sun. Do you remember how we used to talk about going to Italy?"

"You shall go. When the war's over. There's no reason why we shouldn't go. We'll go to the South of France. We'll see Arles and Avignon and Cannes and Antibes and Monte Carlo. You always wanted to see Monte Carlo."

"I don't care about it, dear, if you don't."

"You shall see it. And then we'll go on to Genoa and Rome, Florence and Siena and Assisi. We'll finish up with Venice and come home through Switzerland. It'll be the holiday of all our life. At last! When the war's over. It may last years yet. But it can't last for ever."

"I don't believe we shall ever do it."

"We shall. You'll see. We can go somewhere every year now. I'm looking forward to Assisi most of all."

For he thought of the Little Flowers of St. Francis.

The next day Matty was down with the flu.

It seemed to him that he had sat up for months and years in this agonising watch between life and death, with Matty lying on the bed before him, drawing sharp quick breaths. He knew no other time. The big white bed and Matty in it filled his mind as it filled the room. All his thoughts were centred there.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon. Up the hill the church bell tolled, stroke after stroke, on a note of lacerating sadness. It seemed to him that of all funeral bells the Wyck bell was the saddest. It tolled for Mrs. Hinton, filling John's heart with an anguish of fore-

boding. Milly was with him. She knew what she was there for. All her young arrogance softly subdued, she watched with him and waited. They took it in turns to sit up at night while the trained nurse slept.

Every night Matty would moan gently, "Don't sit up with me, you'll be so tired."

Dr. Ransome said she might get better of the flu if her heart was stronger. As it was, he was afraid—her heart might stop beating any minute. They must be prepared for that.

And as John sat there he tried to realise it. Any minute. Any minute. This minute, or the next. And realising it he tried hard to resign himself to the will of God. But it was no use. He simply could not bear it. He prayed that if Matty went he might go too. The nearest he could get to resignation was to say to himself that if one of them must die he had rather it should be Matty first. He would not have her go through what he was going through now.

He was afraid to leave the room lest she should die while he was away. All his soul was set on being with her when she died. He knew she would want him.

Milly had left the room. Downstairs the nurse lingered over her dinner. He and Matty were alone together.

"Hadn't you better go and lie down, dear? You were up all last night."

"I'm not tired. Not tired at all."

"You're afraid to leave me."

"I want to be with you."

Her eyes were fixed on him. "John—am I dying?"

There was a moment before he answered. "Darling, you're not afraid?"

"Not if you're with me."

"I shall be with you."

"I wish I could have saved you this." Her eyes closed. "Lift me. Lift me higher. Higher."

He lifted her high against the pillows. His arms remained round her, holding her. He stroked her hair, he wrapped her shawl closer round her.

"Is there nothing you want?" he said. "Think. Think."

"Do you mean the Sacrament?"

"Yes."

"Presently. When I'm not so tired. Let me stay like this a little."

He let her stay.

Milly came back.

"Is Milly there?"

"Yes, Mother."

"Perhaps you'd better give it to me now."

John laid her back against the pillows. He cleared the little table by the bedside, already covered with a clean white cloth. Then he went down to fetch the bread and the wine.

When he came back into the room Matty was dead. She lay with her eyes turned up under their sunk lids and her mouth half open as her last breath had gone from it.

He set down the bread and wine in the place he had prepared for them, as if he had not seen.

"Father, she's gone," Milly whispered.

He sank down on his knees beside the bed. Matty's arm lay stretched outside the coverlet. He bowed his head on her hand. He tried to pray for Matty's soul which had not received the comfort of the Blessed Sacrament. But no words came and no thoughts. Grief, like a sudden night, swept down on him, darkening his mind.

When he rose from his knees he saw Milly looking at him, dry eyed and calm.

"Milly, did she say anything?"

"She asked if you were there."

"I said I would be there and I was not there. If only I'd given it to her before, I should have been with her."

His grief came down on him again.

Half an hour later the church bell began tolling, a second time, for the passing of Matty; slow strokes, measuring the black night of grief.

XX

John thought: "Now that her mother is gone Milly will stay with me. She can't leave me alone."

But Milly was not staying; she had packed up her box to go and she had said nothing about coming back.

He thought: "She doesn't know I want her. I shall have to tell her."

He found her in Matty's room, filling a large trunk with her mother's clothes which she was taking to her poor people in Poplar. John watched her with patient, wounded eyes. His face was twitching.

"Daddy, how your face twitches. I don't like it."

"It's been like that for long enough, my dear."

"Yes, but it's never been so bad. It's awful."

"It's nothing. It's a safety-valve. It probably saves me from something worse."

He looked at her gently. "Milly, dear, you're coming back, aren't you?"

"Of course I'll come back, before very long."

"I mean, my dear, you'll stay with me now, won't you? I want you."

"It's nice of you to want me. But, darling, I don't see how I can do that. There's the work. I can't leave the work."

"Somebody else could do the work."

"No, Daddy, nobody else could. Besides, what is there for me to do here?"

"There's your mother's work, Milly, waiting for you."

"Mother's work? There's nothing you can't do yourself, Daddy, you and the district visitors."

"We can none of us do it as she did it."

"No more can I. Mother had ways of her own."

"Yes, ways of her own. Beautiful ways, Milly. I thought that, if nobody else could, you could take her place."

"Well, Daddy, I can't. I can't possibly leave what I'm doing. It's too important. It wouldn't be right of me."

"You think it would be wrong to come and look after me now that I've no one?"

"I think it would be very wrong. You see, Daddy, I've a vocation. I'm dedicated as much as any nun. If I was in a convent you wouldn't expect me to leave it and come and look after you. Why, if I was married you wouldn't. Mary'll look after you."

"I can look after myself if it comes to that. Well—well, don't let's say any more about it. I daresay it was selfish of me to think of it."

"No, Daddy, it wasn't selfish. You—you just didn't understand."

"I understand now. If you feel like that about it there's no more to be said. I've no right to take you from your duty."

"It's dear of you to see it that way. There really is no other way."

"No. No other way. You're a good child, Milly."

"I'll come and see you lots of times, more than I used to."

"Yes, come and see me. I shall always be glad to have you."

"You're a darling, Daddy. You always understand."

Milly was pressing down the clothes into the trunk with firm, competent hands. She looked round her. Matty's vicuna shawl lay folded at the foot of the bed. She rose and took it up. John laid his hand on her arm.

"No, Milly," he said, "I can't let you take that."

"Oh, why not, it would be so useful."

"You must leave me that. I want to have something about me that was hers."

"Oh, well, I should have thought you couldn't have borne to see it. Her poor things." She was still holding the shawl.

"I don't feel about her that way, Milly. Give it to me."

She gave it to him unwillingly.

"Well, take it. I know a poor woman who would be glad of it. But I suppose that doesn't matter."

He could see that she was vexed about the shawl. He opened his pocket-book and took out two pound notes.

"You can have that," he said, "to buy another shawl."

"Oh, Daddy, I didn't meant that. It *is* good of you," said Milly, taking it. She thought: "It's silly of him. But he's getting old."

John went out, carrying his shawl. He took it into his own room (he had slept in the spare room since

Matty's death). He folded it tenderly, kissed it and laid it at the foot of his bed. He would feel it lying there over his feet in the night, Matty's shawl. Sometimes he would wear it and think of her. More than anything it reminded him of Matty; he had so often gone to fetch it, so often picked it up when it slipped from her shoulders, so often gathered it round her thin breast.

Miss Minchin had called. She was sitting with John in his study.

"Has Milly gone?" she said.

"Yes. She went yesterday."

"But she's coming back again, to stay?"

"No, she's not coming back again."

"But she must, she must. She can't leave you like this, with her poor mother gone."

"Ah, Grace, with Matty gone, it doesn't much matter to me how I'm left. Besides, Milly couldn't stay. She has duties which she can't give up."

"Nonsense, she could give them up perfectly well if she chose. You needn't tell me there's nobody else who could do her work."

"Milly doesn't think there is. No, Grace, she's doing the right thing. I wouldn't have her go against her conscience. She's doing noble work and I've no right to keep her from it."

"You're too good. Many a father would have insisted on her staying on here. She couldn't go on if you cut off supplies."

"I shouldn't dream of doing that, or of insisting on

anything. Milly's doing something more important than looking after me."

"Who *is* looking after you?"

"I'm quite capable of looking after myself, Grace."

"I don't believe it. You'll never take care of yourself, never save yourself."

"I wasn't put into this world to save myself."

"Oh, if only I could do something for you. There's nothing that I wouldn't do. Nothing."

"I know. You are goodness and kindness itself. Nobody can do anything for me except help to look after my poor people, and that you do."

"That's nothing. If I could only do something for *you*. You don't know," she said, "how sorry I am."

"You needn't be sorry for me. I've had thirty-one years of happy life. Which of us can expect so much?"

"But it's all over," she wailed, "it's all over."

"No, Grace, it isn't all over. It's only just beginning. I do not think I shall have so many years to live without her. I'm an old man, thank God."

"Don't talk like that. What should we do without you?"

"You might do better. My best work is done."

"Your work will never be done. You will go on. I can't see you not going on."

"As long as I can, Grace, I shall. But who knows how long that will be?"

"Oh," she said, "you break my heart."

"Your heart is too kind. You mustn't worry about me. God will be good to me. He *is* good."

"Well," she said, "I can't forgive Milly."

"There's nothing to forgive. It's all right, all perfectly right. Milly's in her right place."

"No, Milly's right place is with you. Don't talk to me about her work. If I'd been your daughter, or your sister, I'd never have left you. Never. No matter what my work was I'd have given it up for you."

"And perhaps you would have been doing wrong. Milly will come back to me any minute when I want her."

"She'll come, but she won't stay."

"I shall not want her to stay."

"If there was only something you wanted that I could do."

"There's nothing. Nothing but what you're doing. It's enough."

He thought: "If only she wouldn't be so kind; if only she would leave me."

And presently she left him.

"Mind you," she said, as they parted at the garden gate, "I don't forgive Milly."

John went slowly up the garden path. His heart was heavy. This kindness, that was not Matty's kindness, hurt him. It was all that was left to him. And his house was empty.

Six months passed.

It was a hot day in August. Warm puffs of air from the south came through the open window of John's study. He had been out all morning under the burning sun, visiting in the parish. He had been sent for as he was writing his sermon.

Only a few more lines to finish. He waited till he had had lunch, and now the sermon lay beside him on his writing-table. He took it up and read over what he had written.

"'God so loved the world.' . . .

'Hard things have been said about the doctrine of the Atonement by men who have not believed in it. They have said: "Here is a God, the first person of a Trinity, creating the world, a very imperfect world, however we look at it, allowing evil things to happen in it, letting His world go from bad to worse till he can bear it no longer and is angry and demands a sacrifice for the sin of the world. What does he do? He sends his own son, the second person of the Trinity, into the world to be destroyed and to be tortured and to suffer death on the cross." They say it is a commercial transaction; God redeems or buys back the world with the sacrifice of his son, by which sacrifice he appeases his own anger. And if that is not making the worst of a bad job, what is it? they say.

'But this is not the way we should look at the Atonement, as a transaction between two persons. In fixing our minds on two persons we are forgetting the unity of the Godhead, forgetting that it is God Himself who took on the flesh of Jesus, God Himself who was crucified and died and rose from the dead, and that God, who was and is for ever incarnate in Jesus Christ, is incarnate also in humanity for ever, that he labours and suffers, is crucified, dies and lives again in humanity. In each one of us there is this labouring, suffering divinity. And this is the At-one-ment, the making one with God.

It goes on forever, in every impulse of goodwill, in every kind thought, in every victorious struggle to do right, ay, and in defeat, when we have fought well and are broken and beaten. Those who have fallen in the Great War have made At-one-ment, not in so much as they have offered a sacrifice for sin, as that they have brought to light the God in them. . . . ' "

"The God in them." But what was he going to say next? He took up his pen and tried to think of something, to follow up his theme, to give his best and nothing but his best. But no thoughts came to him. His head was heavy and ached slightly; when he tried to think the heaviness and the pain increased.

"The God in them." But what next? Only a few more lines to finish; if he could only *think*.

There was a sudden shifting in his brain, the blood rushed up into it, swamping it with darkness. A feeling of sickness came over him. He got up and staggered to the door, opened it and fell face downwards and lay across the threshold, dead.

When Milly came down with the Attwaters for the funeral, she found the unfinished sermon and gave it to Philip to read. And Philip said, "So that's the way he worked it. I wonder if he knew how unorthodox he was."

THE END